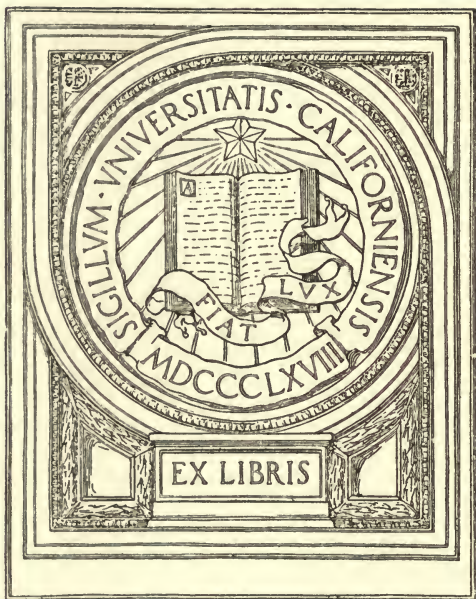


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THE
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THE LEECH CLUB;

OR, THE

MYSTERIES OF THE CATSKILLS.

BY

GEORGE W. OWEN.

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA



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THE LEECH CLUB;

OR,

THE MISTERIES OF THE CATSKILLS.

CHAPTER I.

ABOVE THE CLOUDS.

It matters not about the precise date of this tale. The events herein narrated are of such recent occurrence that most of the characters are still living, and should the dates be too nicely fixed, many who figure in these pages would be pestered with inquiries from the curious that might not be pleasant.

One who will readily be recognized as a principal character of this narrative, as it develops itself, will here be introduced. Not in a richly-furnished parlor, nor in a counting-room with the concomitants of commercial wealth; nor yet in a lowly tenement or cottage, or an unpretending place of business; nor in a palace coach, or second-class railway car; nor jauntily dashing along upon the highway behind a spirited team of chargers; nor yet trudging wearily through lanes, by-ways or frequented avenues, an object of commiseration to the more wealthy traveler sailing by with his elegant turnout. We must introduce our hero, the better to set forth his

true character, where there were no thoroughfares or beaten paths; where the world could scarcely be cognizant of his existence, and where he, if he looked down upon the world at all, only did so to regret that *it* existed, and that his walking dream of ethereal bliss was not a reality.

The Catskills! The name suggests to the whilom voyager on the classic Hudson a vision of airy and weird peaks, and recollections of mysterious legends. Stretching for miles parallel with the upper Hudson, from six to twelve miles from the river, a valley intervening, variegated with farms, woodlands, glens, winding rivulets sparkling through deep ravines, forest-capped hills,—those grand old mountains in the rear present to the enchanted gaze of the traveler the forms of colossal deities, with a mosaic-carpeted amphitheater in front, where admiring pilgrims may come and worship at their feet.

Not many years ago, had a voyager on the deck of a passing Hudson steamer been provided with a powerful telescope, and happened to direct it to a certain one of the high peaks of the Catskills, he would have observed a man treading its airy heights, alone, or at least with no companions but his own thoughts, the fleeting clouds, the shapeless rocks, and the varied objects of nature that were evidently engrossing his attention. It was just such a day as the admirer of mountain scenery would choose for the ascension of a high peak. It was not perfectly clear, nor yet so cloudy but an outlook upon the grand panorama around could generally be obtained through the rifts which the stiff breeze was constantly making in the hurrying clouds.

There he strode as one walking on ethereal heights, having abandoned the world below as too earthy for the engrossment of immortal mind. The rugged peaks of the Catskills were spread out around him like a sea of immense billows, which had been petrified into solid masses in some long past geological age; while now from their sides spring forests of deep, rich foliage, separated into terraces by massive and perpendicular ledges of rock, with almost the regularity of human art, and with the

grandeur only reached by the master hand of Nature. The billowy peaks are separated by immense ravines, through which tumble streams of water in continuous cataracts, anon receiving accessions from the mountain sides; as if the upheaval of this sea of rocks were again melting into its original liquid, and giving it back to the yawning gorges. In just such magnificent confusion as might be expected to arise from a greatly agitated sea, lie the detached *debris* of rocks, which have apparently been caps or fragments of billows broken off from the more gigantic waves, and incontinently petrified. Some immense boulders stand upon the end; as if the Titans of old had engaged in the amusement of balancing pyramids upon the apex. Sometimes two gigantic slabs will meet each other at the top at an inclination; suggesting the thought that some giant aborigine had made his wigwam by hurling two rocks together. Sometimes a nicely chiseled passage will be found cut through a ledge; furnishing for antiquarians a possible theory that the pre-Adamite inhabitants of the country had made cuts through the solid rock for some thoroughfare older than the Appian way. Openings frequently appear in the solid rock, forming rooms sometimes shapeless as the den of a wild beast, but often of regular dimensions, having the angles clearly defined; where, perhaps, some feudal Titan had chiseled out in the hard rock under his castle a gloomy prison for such of his vassals as might incur his displeasure.

The flying clouds played around these wild peaks like charging battalions of the warring elements, while the individual we have mentioned, walked upon the mountain crests, apparently communing with the objects of grandeur around. None of the pigmy affairs of the lower world seemed worthy of his attention. He spoke to the mountain, and the opening gorge was the mouth from which came the answer. If he felt human at all, it was as one standing upon the very pinnacles of earthly affairs, where the terrestrial and ethereal meet; where man feels that he has glimpses into the arcana of the celestial, and anticipates a little of the experience which he can only fully realize by mounting entirely beyond the influence of

sublunary things. The rifts in the clouds revealed to him the cultivated world below, and occasionally reminded him that he was human; while the inexpressible coloring imparted by the sun to the massive, irregular clouds, which appeared almost blended with the jagged mountain peaks, caused the openings, with the blue sky beyond, to appear like celestial gates, through which he, favored of mortals, had the momentary pleasure of gazing. Thus he almost imagined himself as walking on clouds; as holding converse with the forces of nature; as grasping both the ethereal and the terrestrial; which seemed, for the moment, a state of even greater bliss than that enjoyed by the happy spirits of the departed.

Such are the inspirations presented to him who truly appreciates mountain scenery.

CHAPTER II.

LOOKING DOWN UPON A THUNDER-STORM.

THE lower legions of clouds, wearied with the aimless marching and counter-marching through empty space, finally began to marshal their forces into a solid mass, evidently intent upon some enterprise of moment. It appeared as if the standard which these misty battalions all recognized, had been reared by some commanding cloud; and directly there was a rushing for the common rallying point. The skirmishing mists were called in; the light troops which had been apparently acting as flying *vedettes*, came galloping toward the rendezvous; the more massive bodies of clouds, like outlying divisions of an army, moved with a slower, firmer, but not less surer tread toward the position where the forces were gathering.

Soon the individual we have observed upon one of the lofty peaks, found the peak on which he stood, environed by a solid mass of black, angry clouds. But this mass was several hundred feet below him. Above and all around the point where he stood was a cloudless sky. Apparently

the clouds which had a short time before been flying through space overhead, and all around, had gathered in the grand rally just beneath the feet of our hero. The sun, which had reached a point about half way between the meridian and the horizon, shone forth with all the splendor of noonday upon the peak where he stood, and upon the dark mass of clouds beneath.

The view of the lower world was entirely shut off with the exception of a gap in the vast body of dark clouds. This divided the body much like two contending armies.

And now the battle of the elements commenced. The guns were unlimbered, and the thundering artillery rolled in deafening reverberations through the gorges, ravines and caverns of the mountains. The forked lightning darted across the chasm which separated the two masses of clouds, making them verily appear like two battling armies hurling at each other their fiery thunderbolts. Occasionally would be heard an astounding roar, as if all the batteries in both armies had opened at once, or as if a gigantic mine had been exploded, and a huge mountain had been blown to atoms. In addition to the thundering explosions, there was heard a constant roar, as of the fierce breathing of many winds, and the mighty rushing of many waters. The upper face of the dark mass of clouds, as the spectator looked down upon it, presented the surface of a troubled sea, whose billows were splendidly and variously colored and shaded by the bright sunlight; while anon terrific explosions would resound from its uttermost depths; and tortuous streaks of lightning would dart over the surface like fiery sea-serpents chasing their prey.

If the spectator who stood above, contemplating this scene of awful grandeur, had before been constrained to consider himself lifted above the earth in standing upon those peaks, he could, with a very little additional stretch of the imagination, have fancied himself a demigod directing the battle of the elements below; if, indeed, he could so far forget human littleness as to conceive it capable of commanding such supernatural forces. The position was one either to humiliate or elevate the beholder. If he viewed it in terror, he could not otherwise than be humbled into the dust. If he embraced the scene as an immortal spirit which had been favored with a view of

the eternal, such as is deigned to few that have not escaped the clog of clay which obscures the vision of the soul, then he must have been elated beyond expression, and viewed the scene as an exhibition of the power of which he himself was a component part—assuming the truth of the doctrine that man is a spark from his Maker. View it as he would, the scene was one never to be forgotten.

But our hero was soon to be startled from his contemplative mood, and brought to a sense of the realities of his situation. The storm did not long confine itself to the regions below the mountain peak where he stood. Gradually arising, the clouds soon enveloped the peak, and soon he was drenched in the driving rain. No shelter was at hand, and amid the blinding storm he commenced descending the peak toward the west.

The formation of the Catskill mountains is not peculiarly favorable to a rapid and safe descent down their sides by a pedestrian. The mountain side is often composed of a succession of terraces, each terrace bounded by a high, rocky precipice. Thus the traveler, as he attempts to descend the mountain, soon finds himself hemmed off by a precipice, that stops his progress. He finds that he is upon a narrow, natural terrace which he has no alternative but to follow until he finds a break in the rocky wall. By clambering down among boulders, catching to trees, shrubs and crags, he manages to descend to the next terrace, again to find his further progress in that direction barred by another precipice. He is simply on another terrace, along which he must carefully thread his way, till he comes to another break in the wall. How long it will take him to descend the mountain in this manner depends either on his good fortune in striking broken sections in the terrace wall, or his knowledge of the locality of the same.

Our hero was not acquainted with the mountains. He was soon lost in the labyrinth of terraces, and wandered about at random. The blinding rain continued to descend in torrents, darkness set in, and the situation became alarming. The hideous roar of the thunder re-echoing from a thousand gorges and ravines, the lurid flashes of lightning, momentarily lighting up the weird rocks, caverns and gnarled trees, would have overwhelmed a less resolute heart. He had need to tread

with the utmost caution, else he would have been dashed to atoms down some awful precipice. The glaring lightning was an agent of good, for it served to light his dubious and dangerous path. With calm fortitude he pursued his aimless way; the lightning like an ignis fatuus luring him on; hopeful that he would finally extricate himself from the trying situation.

SUPERNATURAL APPEARANCES.

The terrors which beset him were not confined to the belching thunder, or the danger of being hurled from a precipice. Strange noises filled the intervals between the rolling thunder and its echoes. Whisperings filled the air; figures which seemed to be a compromise between substance and the impalpable air, brushed past him, their insubstantial garments making the slightest abrasion against his own apparel. - He approached a narrow, rocky defile, through which he must pass. As he neared it, a continuous glare of sheet lightning illuminated the gorge. There appeared, seated on the rocks on either side of the defile, a number of figures, half man, half demon. Almost paralyzed with astonishment, he stopped short, debating in his mind whether to recede or advance. The glare of lightning continued in the most unaccountable manner, revealing to his vision the figures in a way that seemed conclusive that he could not be mistaken. Frantic with desperation, he hurled his walking stick at one of the figures, only a few feet off. It seemed to pass through the object with no more impression than on empty space. Presently the glare of lightning subsided, and nothing was to be seen. Accusing himself of foolishly imagining the presence of ghostly beings, he rushed forward; but just as he had gotten fully within the gorge, a similar, continuous glare of lightning again revealed his ghostly neighbors; this time so near that he could have touched them with his hand. As he rushed forward through this demoniacal gauntlet, a hollow laugh saluted his ears; and he was only too glad that this was drowned by a rolling explosion of thunder.

How far he wandered among the nightly terrors of the Catskills, it is impossible to say. It was near mid-

night when the storm ceased, the sky became clear, and the moon shone down faintly through the openings in the foliage of the giant trees. Threading his way on through the mountains, he finally saw lights twinkling through the trees. Approaching, he came to a brawling stream of water. The volume of water and swift running current rendered the stream unfordable, and he followed it down till he came in sight of a building. A short distance from the edifice the stream parted into two currents, commingling again below the building, and falling in a beautiful cascade into a small lake. The building was thus located on an island, and as the volume of water in the two streams was considerable, and the current swift, the house could only be reached by means of a bridge.

It was now about midnight, and after the terrific ordeal through which our hero had passed, it was with some trepidation that he approached this moated dwelling, which appeared like a castle in the wilderness. The bridge was evidently constructed as a draw, but it was at that time in the proper position for crossing. He felt as if entering upon enchanted ground as he crossed the threshold of the lonely precincts. Had he been superstitious, he never would have approached this dubious looking dwelling after the experiences of that night. It is true he did not feel certain that he might not meet just such strange beings as had haunted his fearful wanderings in the mountains. After a brief survey of the premises, he came to the conclusion that the constructors of this building must have something more than ghostly attributes, and chilled with the rain and exhausted by his wanderings, he determined to see if the inmates possessed human hospitalities. Drawing near to the building he heard music, and this rather reassured him; for he reasoned that evil spirits do not cultivate such refining arts; and that men who do so, must have considerable humanity still left in them.

Approaching the door, he raised a huge knocker, which descending on the plate, caused the mountain dells around to echo, and called forth growls and barking from several unseen dogs about the premises. He was admitted. And what was his astonishment to be ushered into a spa-

cious, finely-furnished room, and a large company of gaily-dressed ladies and gentlemen! At one end of the room was stationed a band of musicians, while several sets of dancers were on the floor, either having been engaged in a quadrille, or just about to commence one. The entrance of the stranger brought matters to a halt, and all gathered around to view this visitor from the outward realms of night. Our hero's clothes were dripping with wet, and his countenance wore an anxious, but not terrified expression. Some brief questions followed; to which he answered that he had accidentally gotten lost in the mountains. He was puzzled beyond expression at finding such a dwelling and such a company there; but restraining his curiosity, he was conducted to a room where a wood fire was speedily started in a fireplace. Refreshments were placed before him; after partaking of which, and drying himself by the fire, he was shown to a sleeping apartment. Having thus disposed of our hero, after a troublous night, such as seldom falls to the lot of mortals, we will return to the company in the large parlor.

The dancers had seemingly given up their festivities, and were gathered in groups discussing the apparition of the stranger at such an unseasonable hour. By observing their conversation we may gather something respecting their quality, and the cause of their being assembled in this singular locality. The appearance of the company, viewed in comparison with the surrounding concomitants, was enough to excite the amazement, if not superstition, of any one who had not forgotten the fairy tales of the nursery, learned in childhood. Amid the surrounding poverty of rocks, forests and mountain gorges, whence those costly toilets, those sparkling diamonds, glittering jewelry, and rich attire of every description? The rooms, too, were furnished with a gorgeousness that immeasurably belied the situation. The parlors of no merchant prince in the distant city could outdo those of this forest palace in superfluous richness.

Were the house and furniture a solid reality, and the festive throng, persons of real flesh and blood? or were the building and its garniture but the conjuration of the ruling genius of the mountains, and the gaily-bedecked

semblances of men and women, the airy genii, who had so greatly frightened our hero in his nightly meanderings, and now gathered in a fairy palace to entertain, after having so sorely persecuted him? Such freaks are not inconsistent with the genii of the story books. But, having exhausted all conjectures without arriving at any conclusion, we will listen to the conversation of the genii, and see if we can gather anything more tangible from that. First speaks a gorgeous looking fairy, who might have been taken for Titania, the queen of her tribe:

"Isn't it curious! I do believe that strange man has been rained down in the shower, or shot from the clouds in one of those awful claps of thunder!"

"Yes, indeed, Mrs. Grandola,"—answered a masculine genius arrayed in immense gorgeousness, suggestive of the idea that he might be Oberon, king of the fairies,—“yes, indeed, Mrs. Grandola, the stranger looked as scared as if he had either fallen from a cloud or been interviewed by some of those goblins of the Catskills that we hear so much about.”

"Nonsense, Mr. Swellup! I don't believe one word of these idle stories."

"But," struck in a spruce little masculine fairy, who might have been Puck, "if you should have such ocular demonstration as I had in these mountains one night, I warrant you would change your opinion."

"Poh! Mr. Flitaway, ever since you were before that investigating committee in regard to that little matter of a hundred thousand which your bill for stationery is said to have been 'raised,' you have been haunted by accusing ghosts."

"I think, now, Mrs. Grandola," said a young man with diamond rings and enormous fob, "you have hit the nail on the head. I should not be surprised if this scared looking stranger is an agent of one of those pestiferous investigating committees, sent here to spy out our Club House, and gather what information he can, to be used against us by our persecutors."

"If I thought he was," said another, "I would give him to the pet wolf out there in the cage for a collation."

"Isn't it a burning shame," said a young lady, loaded with jewelry, and so encumbered with trailing laces that

what little humanity was visible, appeared rather like an ornamented wax figure accidentally dropped into a confused mass of rich dry goods,—“isn't it a burning shame that people cannot enjoy the elegancies of life purchased by their own money without being hunted by these hounds, who are only jealous because they have not the means to live in as good style as some of their neighbors!”

“Ah! Miss Gossamer,” said a young fellow in a bantering tone, “there is a difference of opinion as to the ownership of the fine things you speak of. A good many are of the opinion that a thousand yards or so of that variety store you carry about with you, belong to the taxpayers.”

“And,” retorted Miss Gossamer, “how much would be left of you, your fob-chains, diamond rings and exquisite tailoring, if the tax payers had their dues?”

“Tut, tut!” broke in Mr. Swellup, “remember the old proverb, ‘when certain persons fall out among themselves, certain other persons get their dues’; in which case we might all lose what we possess.”

“Indeed, Mr. Swellup,” said Mrs. Grandola, “you speak just as if there was truth in the hue and cry that is made about our getting our money wrongfully from the public funds.”

“Oh! no, Mrs. Grandola, I was only talking from the standpoint assumed by this young lady and gentleman.”

“And I,” said the young gentleman alluded to, “was only giving Miss Gossamer a delicate compliment on her magnificent toilet.”

“And I,” said Miss Gossamer, “only intended to show my friend that I appreciated a compliment coming from so profound a source.”

The conversation continued in a similar strain for a considerable time, when this unique assemblage began to drop away by ones and twos. Whatever opinion the reader may have formed in regard to the supernatural appearances which our hero encountered in his nocturnal wanderings, he has doubtless ere this come to the conclusion that the inhabitants of this strange dwelling were not of a ghostly nature; and that when they left the brilliant parlors, they did not disappear through solid walls of rock or inconceivably narrow crevices into the caves of the mountains;

nor flit away in volatile bodies into the air, and take up their residences on shining clouds to catch the first brilliant rays of the orb of day as he imparts the glorious tints to the clouds and mountain peaks. Not they, indeed. They were rather of the earth, earthy, and when they left the banqueting halls, it was only to retire to their sleeping apartments in the castellated building, that they might acquire new strength to pursue their festive rounds, and consume the substance of the land; on which they feed like a school of leeches.

CHAPTER III.

HORACE LACKFATHE.

WE must leave our hero to his dreams or meditations in the strange domicile, and go to his native place, and see what we can learn of his history. Horace Lackfathe, whom we have followed through a night of wild adventure into what must have appeared to him as the castle of demons or fairies, was born in a small village in a neighboring State. Though born poor, he had managed, by his own exertions, to obtain a good education. He had developed talent of no ordinary degree, and having chosen the legal profession, bid fair to arise to eminence. He had already obtained considerable distinction in his own town, was valued and even courted by the community as a rising young man of high moral principle. He, for a time, felt flattered and gratified at the consideration and success he had achieved, and was stimulated thereby to exertion to rise still higher in the estimation of his fellow-men. Many had already predicted that he one day would occupy high places in private or official life.

But after a few years there was, if not a falling off, at least a stay of progress on the part of Horace Lackfathe. He did not advance to that position which had been predicted for him. He seemed, after having reached a certain point, to be content with mediocrity. Not that his

talents or abilities had been overrated. There was in him the germ of greatness; but for some reason he failed, neglected, or did not care to develop it. He did not depreciate in the respect of his fellow-citizens, for he was a man of high moral tone. He only disappointed those who knew how great a mind he possessed.

The trouble was, Horace Lackfathe had formed in his own mind too high a standard of the excellence of mankind. He had conceived the average human being to be actuated chiefly by principles of honor and magnanimity. Selfishness, moral obliquity, and unscrupulousness in adapting the means to the end, were the exceptions in the Utopian world in which he lived. A natural and intuitive disposition to live uprightly, and deal guilelessly, was the attribute of the man of his conception. He did not believe that a considerable portion of the business world were a set of over-reaching tricksters, who consider it the height of business acumen to get the best of their neighbors in a sharp bargain; he did not believe that the average practitioners in his own profession thought it the refinement of legal *finesse* to carry their points by making that seem true which they knew to be false, and distorting the law and rendering it abortive; he did not believe that the average politicians regarded everything, no matter how disreputable, as "fair in politics;" he did not believe that the statesmanship of the world was a refined system of chicanery, and that statesmen were a lot of high-toned gamblers, who would not hesitate to steal the trump-card, if it were necessary to carry their points; in short, he did not believe that all men were naturally dissemblers.

And women, he regarded as possessing all the magnanimous traits of men, without the angular points of character which the sterner business of the world gives to men. If he regarded men as diamonds whose sharp corners had not been rounded off, he regarded women as polished jewels. He would as soon have suspected that the sun might rise some morning divested of its power to give forth light and heat, as to have supposed that the average woman could be anything else but virtuous. To his exaggerated standard of estimation, woman was all he had conceived man to be, besides possessing the softness, the

spotless virtue, the angelic love, attributed to the sex by the most imaginative and eulogistic poets.

While he looked upon humanity as so high-toned, he labored to achieve the admiration and respect of mankind as the greatest of human attainments. And here, had he stopped to think, was a refutation of the high estimation he had formed of human nature, in himself. For was not this very anxiety to gain applause and esteem for himself, a selfishness on his part that he did not believe existed to a large extent among men? Had mankind been as good as the standard which he had formed, he would have had little thought of the admiration and respect that he himself might win. He would have thought only how he might contribute to the general welfare, and the idea of gaining applause and esteem for himself would never have entered his mind. It is true that the admiration and respect which he thought of gaining, was that which is obtained by good actions which benefit humanity; but still this very desire for good opinions should have been proof to him of the inherent selfishness of human nature, and should have taught him that he had formed a false notion thereof, and set his standard too high. He had an estimation so hyperborean that a discovery of its falsity was likely to place humanity entirely without the pale of his sympathy, and render him utterly regardless of making further effort to win the applause of mankind by improving his usefulness.

While he regarded human nature so highly, the applause and respect of men and women were things worth working for, from sunrise till the waning hours told the approach of another day. To feel that he had the esteem and admiration of his fellow-citizens was much more satisfactory to him than to fill coffers with gold. Nor was he insensible to the influence of the softer passions inspired by the sex he respected so highly. An estimable young woman, from the distant city, who was in the habit of spending her summers in the village where Horace Lackfathe resided, had enkindled in his heart a passion stronger than his desire for fame. And she, knowing the consideration in which he was held in his native village, was proud of his attentions. She was understood to be a teacher, who sought recreation during

the summer vacation in the pure atmosphere of the hills and meadows adjacent to the village. Thus the conditions of the two were apparently not dissimilar, and they were evidently well suited to each other. Miss Charity Faithful was doubtless destined to become Mrs. Lackfathe.

Horace Lackfathe had not mingled enough with men. He had lived too much in the ideal world of books, and his own enthusiastic thoughts. This, combined with a peculiar temperament, rendered him a hyperborean being, different in a measure from those around. He could comprehend only the better part of human nature, and looked upon all deviations from his standard simply as monstrosities, which were the exceptions to the general rule; just as he would view an unusual visitation of frost in mid-summer. So long as his intercourse with the world only occasionally brought him in contact with an individual who did not come up to his standard, he considered it merely as one of those exceptional cases which are to be met with in everything.

A change came over him; and from the most elevated opinion of mankind, he fell into the very opposite extreme of regarding them with universal distrust. It might truly be said that he had no faith at all in the race. Nor was this want of faith in others attended by a sort of self-righteousness on his part. Looking around upon the numerous temptations in which men fell—defaulting cashiers, merchants swindling their creditors, politicians resorting to open and shameless corruption, statesmen stooping to tricks which he thought confined to the gambling dens, faithless husbands and wives,—he began to doubt whether there was a spark of real honor in human nature, and distrusted himself with the rest. He thought that, perhaps, he might also be led to give way to temptation, were he placed in certain situations. He began to be of the opinion that nothing but the most severe discipline could reform mankind, and that none but those who laid down for themselves a stern code of morality, and stuck to it rigidly, could escape the common demoralization.

The change had not come suddenly over Horace Lackfathe. The war of the Rebellion was the first rude shock to his finely organized sensibilities. He was confounded

that men were bad enough to attempt the overthrow of the Republic which he adored. Then the demoralization which attends all wars still further lessened his faith in human nature. The corruption that will always follow in the handling of large sums of money, and the execution of herculean contracts, revealed the worst shade of human nature in its unspeakable deformity. The statesmanship of the world was also illustrated in its hypocrisy, selfishness, and time-serving expedients. The veil was rudely torn from what he supposed to be the angelic nature of women and the unswerving morality of men. Wives whose husbands had gone to fight the battles of their country were often found faithless to their marriage vows, and husbands who had gotten beyond the influence of their family circles frequently forgot that they owed allegiance to the one who presided over their distant homes.

The rude world to which Horace Lackfathe had just wakened up, was not the Utopian one of his day dreams. It was not the world that had inspired his aims to gain its good opinion and high consideration. He was gradually coming to regard its good opinion as scarcely worth laboring for, and consequently his exertions slackened. To him, now, the high opinion of men in general seemed nothing more than the applause of a demoralized crowd given over to moral perdition; the consideration of statesmen and men of high degree seemed but the approbation of the aristocracy of transgressors; the admiration of women seemed but the flattery of those in whose virtue he had been deceived. So he almost ceased his efforts to build himself up in the estimation of such a world, and thus his talents, which were of the first order, were allowed to remain in abeyance. He still, however, continued to perform the duties of his position in a correct and upright manner.

At the date we introduced him to the reader in his strange adventure in the Catskill mountains, it was some time after the close of the Rebellion, when he was something over thirty years of age; and as subsequent events will show, he had not by any means improved in his estimation of his fellow-men. And, indeed, if he took public men as the standard of human excellence, he had little

reason to think the race had improved since the beginning of the war.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LEECH CLUB.

SOME days after the adventure of Horace Lackfathe in the Catskills, a company was gathered in a richly furnished parlor in a neighboring city. The appearance and surroundings of this company rather betokened superfluous riches than refinement. The parlors, though furnished to profusion, presented a tawdry rather than a beautiful appearance. Costly furniture was incongruously thrown together without that nice display of taste usually shown by people who have learned to appreciate such elegancies, and arrange them with a view to harmony. The dress and physiognomy of the company seemed as much out of character as the rooms and furniture. There was a superfluity of diamonds, jewelry, rich clothes, silks, laces, etc.; apparently donned by the wearers in order to get on their persons as much as possible of the finery of the day, because they had the money to pay for it—and having but one life to live, desired to enjoy as much of their riches as possible. The carriage and presence of these people might have led a stranger to suspect that the attaches of the kitchen of the establishment had, in the absence of the real owners thereof, loaded themselves incongruously with the fine apparel of their masters, and were playing at gentleman and lady in the parlors for a short time. Nevertheless, there were present several high officials, including a member of Congress and a member of the State Legislature. We shall find there are some here whose acquaintance we briefly made in that mysterious mansion in the Catskills. Mr. Swellup, addressing the Congressman, said:

“Mr. Longterm, now that Congress has adjourned, and you have honored the Leech Club with a few days’ residence at their rooms in the City, I hope you will also al-

low us the pleasure of your company for a longer stay at our Club House in the Catskills."

"Indeed, I was not aware that you had a Club House in the Catskills. Something rustic, I suppose? not on such a magnificent scale as your Club House in the City?"

"Well, not quite; but it is not a poverty-stricken mansion, I can tell you. It is built of the native stone of the mountains, but the inside finishing and furniture are as good as this very building we are now in. It is in a secluded valley, surrounded on all sides by a swift running stream of water, which, for a novelty, is crossed by a drawbridge, so as to remind us somewhat of the habitations of the old feudal barons. There is good fishing in the streams, and the mountain forests are not destitute of game. Bears, and even occasionally a panther, are found."

"And," said Mr. Flitaway, "there are other means of excitement besides the bears and panthers. And our stone building with its iron doors and shutters, and iron roof, and drawbridge, affords us other satisfaction than that of imagining ourselves in a feudal castle. Some of the strangest noises and sights are sometimes heard and seen in those mountains. Some believe that the mountains are a favorite haunt of spirits, while others believe that they are infested by a gang of robbers or counterfeiters, who get up supernatural appearances in order to frighten people from frequenting the mountains, and so disturbing them in the pursuit of their vocation. Figures resembling men have been seen to disappear in the face of a solid ledge of rock, where, upon examination, no aperture except a mere seam could be found. Some, who are not superstitious, but have witnessed with their own eyes this unaccountable disappearance of what looked like men, into the solid rock, try to explain it on the supposition that there is a gang of men who have caves in the rocks, and have some powerful machinery within by which they can raise a large rock which forms the door of the cave, into which they quickly retire, when the great door is suddenly closed. For my part, I think it requires greater faith to believe this theory than to believe that the mysterious figures are supernatural beings."

"Indeed," said Mr. Longterm, "you have excited my curiosity so that I shall certainly accept your invitation to visit this wonderful region. With angling for trout, hunting bears, and hob-nobbing with ghosts, I doubt not that I shall be able to kill time for a week or two. But if I should get worsted in an argument with the ghostly crew, and be compelled to retreat into the castle, I fear that your drawbridge, and iron doors and shutters, will be but a poor protection against those spirits, who go right into the solid rock."

"As to that, whatever these apparitions are, ghosts or men, they have never yet made their appearance inside of our Club House, nor even across the drawbridge."

"Perhaps you keep the draw open, and these ghosts, like cats, may not like to wet their feet by wading the stream," suggested Mr. Longterm.

"Indeed," said Miss Gossamer, "you won't be so much disposed to jest about this matter if you encounter these demons in the mountains on some moonlight evening. Only a short time before we left, a stranger got benighted in the mountains in one of those terrible thunder storms, and by some means straggled upon the Club House; and when he entered he looked as though he had just had a tilt with the Evil One. We have since found out that he saw strange things in the mountains."

"And," said Mr. Swellup, "this stranger, who gave his name as Horace Lackfathe, is about as much of a puzzle to me as the ghosts. He claims to be a lawyer by profession, and says he came out into the mountains for the improvement of his health. He is a man of good education; and we have prevailed on him to remain with us during the summer and teach the children of some members of the Club, who don't care to have them lose too much time from their studies."

"Just the thing," said Mr. Longterm. "My two boys are preparing for college, and want to improve their time."

"And," said Mrs. Grandola, "he can introduce you to the demons, as I don't doubt but he is a relation of theirs."

Mr. Longterm smiled, and then remarked to Mr. Swellup: "By the way, I judge by the number of splen-

did establishments kept up by the Leech Club, that it is more profitable to be a municipal officer or a member of the Legislature than a member of Congress; as the members of your Club are mostly city officials, or connected with the State Government."

"In that you are right," said Mr. Swellup. "I had much rather be an Alderman or a member of the Legislature than to be a United States Senator."

"But the pay is not so large."

"Oh! no; but there are perquisites that more than make up the difference; as you can judge from the fact that the members of the Leech Club have nearly all amassed large fortunes from their official positions."

"And what are these perquisites, pray?"

"One large item is for legal services."

"But you are not all lawyers?"

"Oh! no, a man can act as attorney for another without being a lawyer. For instance," continued Mr. Swellup, "in the city there are large contracts to be put out on the various public works. It is a very simple matter for a man to act as attorney for any one who wants to get a contract. The profits are generally good on such work, and the contractor can afford to pay an Alderman liberally for acting as his attorney in obtaining for him the job. Why, I have known a contractor to realize a profit of \$50,000 on a small job of cleaning two or three streets for six months. Of this sum about \$40,000 goes to the Alderman or other official who acts as attorney, and the contractor gets the balance. I have known an official to make \$10,000 for legal services for a contractor just for the plastering of one room in a public building. The contractor's whole profits on such a job would probably be about \$15,000, he making \$5,000, and the city official getting \$10,000 for legal services. On the larger contracts, such as the opening of streets, the improvement of parks, and the erection of large public buildings, I have known the profits to run up into the hundreds of thousands, and even millions, on a single job. Invariably the official who acts as attorney for the contractor gets much the larger portion of the profits, as he should, for without his influence the contractor never could have obtained the job. So it is on all public

works. The contractors must have attorneys to look after their interests; and who can better act as such attorney than those who have positions in the City Government?

"As to members of the Legislature, they also have excellent opportunities to make good fees by acting as attorneys. Railroad companies and other powerful corporations have bills which they desire passed. It is very necessary to have attorneys to look after such things. Certainly, no man is better qualified for acting as attorney in getting a bill passed than a member of the Legislature. Railroad and other large corporations are in fact the real Government of the country. If a man wants to be elected to the Legislature, he has need of the aid of any railroad corporation that may be in his district. The railroad corporations actually choose legislative and executive officers; and these officials may in reality consider themselves elected as the attorneys of these companies. Therefore, the most of men when they go to the Legislature are engaged beforehand as the attorneys of railroads and other rich corporations, and it is their bounden duty to act as such. But while the legislators are the legal servants of these corporations, even though the latter did not pay them another dollar after aiding in their election, the companies always pay the members of the Legislature liberally for legal services every time they want a bill passed. There is nothing mean about these rich corporations. I tell you, sir, the railroads are the ruling power in the country, and we might as well admit it first as last. There is not half the ability manifested in our State Government as in some railroad corporations that I could name. I sometimes think it is hardly necessary for the Legislature to meet at all, for it generally but registers the decrees of the railroad corporations.

"Why not let the Presidents of the railroads get together, and say what they want, and let the legislators stay at home? The country would save money by it; for it has to pay the expense of getting the Legislature together to do what the railroads require, and the latter have to pay legal fees to the members; and then the companies are obliged to charge the public higher for fares and freights

in order to make up for the expense of legislation. I tell you, sir, if you would just let the railroads and other rich corporations take the Government in hand, they would run it with less expense than it is administered at present. Nor would the members of the Legislature be turned loose upon the world, without employment or support. They could be engaged at a liberal compensation to help take charge of the railroads."

Thus spoke this model statesman, Mr. Swellup. To such a venal pass had the politicians of his school come, that they talked among themselves of the most outrageous acts of public robbery and corruption, as unblushingly as if they were the most legitimate business affairs of life. Surrounded there in his own parlors by every luxury which his uncultivated taste and ill-gotten wealth could procure, with the exception of a certain low shrewdness, he possessed no intellectual advantages over the obscure rabble from which he emerged only a few years ago. Destitute of all sense of public propriety, this man was at the head of a political faction which controlled a large State. The shameless acts of this clique were, with the exception of a few of the most criminal robberies of the public treasury, done as openly as if they were entirely legitimate. No effort was made to conceal proceedings which should have sent certain officials to the State Prison.

It appeared as though the infamous clique represented by Mr. Swellup were either so ignorant that they did not appreciate the scandal of their own transactions, or else they hoped to make roguery respectable by practicing it openly, and making it common. Thus the depravity of the young men of their set, growing up around them, was astounding. The clique lived in an unbounded, gorgeous extravagance, supported chiefly by public plunder; and they plied their vocation as openly as the respectable portion of the community did their honest callings. Their aped-gentility was rendered the more detestable by a coarse vulgarity. Strong in the possession of political power, they carried themselves with an insolence as galling to the honest tax-payers from whom they had stolen their wealth, as the rattling of the chains is to the slave bound to the one who robs him of the fruits of his honest labor. These

unfledged noblemen of the pilfered treasury spoke of those who made any pretensions to honesty, with contempt, and exalted any man who, by shrewd rascality, managed to amass a fortune. Honesty was with them a by-word, and they spoke of "stealings" as the great desideratum of any position, public or private, with as great nonchalance as if such were a part of the recognized perquisites of any shrewd man who should have the handling of funds.

And it was rather discouraging for those who rely greatly on human nature, to observe how fast this faction were infusing their turpitude into the community. People actually began to view with indifference the shameless lives of this clique. Had they endeavored to rob the public treasury secretly, they would soon have been detected and brought to grief. But the long, open and successful pursuit of their nefarious calling, caused people gradually to regard them as being engaged in legitimate practices. Their great wealth enabled them to daze the less thoughtful, and corrupt the weak and venal. It may seem strange, but it is true, that what before had been looked upon as criminal, was getting to be regarded as right, and a matter of course; simply because this clique had openly practiced infamy, and thrown around it the glamour of wealth. It is therefore evident that no monstrosity is too absurd or infamous to pass for a time unchallenged, provided it is attended with success.

The more thoughtful portion of the community looked upon the doings of this clique in powerless horror. The clique had made politics and office-holding so disreputable that men of reputation shrunk from taking any part in them. There was such shrewdness mingled with their rascality that they seemed to be constantly gaining strength. They scattered their stolen wealth freely in every direction, resorting to specific bribery where that was best, and to insidious bribery where that was more expedient. They extended a lavish patronage to the newspaper press, and thus insidiously propitiated that powerful engine to their interests. Men controlling powerful journals, who would have scorned a specific bribe, were thus subtly won over by receiving liberal contracts in the way of public printing. The clique were constantly increasing their ranks

by taking into close communion those who were men after their own hearts. They were extending their ramifications into other States, and obtaining a foothold in the halls of the Federal Government. They had united their fortunes and forces with the unscrupulous heads of powerful railroad companies and other great corporations; so that the assertion of Mr. Swellup that these were the real Government of the country, had a shade of truth. Every rich corporation, which happened to be controlled by unscrupulous men, who needed any legislation to aid their nefarious designs, or feared any adverse enactments, were either a part of this clique, or else were its tributaries.

In a word, their dazzling wealth and unconcealed venality had blinded the multitude; their money was ready to hire the venal to corrupt the ballot-box; the apparent hopelessness of the situation, and the unutterable ill-repute into which politics had fallen, had driven honest men to the shades of private life, glad if they could preserve a moiety of their effects from the rapacious crew; they moulded the venal of all parties to subserve their base purposes, and thus had their friends in every political organization; and so a legalized highway robbery held high carnival, and men began to ask, "Is this what is called a Republican Government?"

CHAPTER V.

THE CASTLE OF THE LEECH CLUB.

As might be expected, when Horace Lackfathe retired to bed in the mysterious dwelling in the Catskills, his mind was racked by a good many conflicting thoughts. At first he was disposed to surmise that he had fallen upon a den of junketing outlaws, and was in doubt with regard to his safety. But a little reflection satisfied him that this could not be so; for he reasoned that, notwithstanding he had wandered a long distance inland, he could not be at most more than a few miles from the haunts of

civilization, and that a building of this size could not long remain unknown to the wanderers among the Catskills. He was not superstitious enough to believe that such a structure could be the creation of supernatural agencies, which could obliterate it at as short notice as they called it into existence. He therefore rightly reasoned that the building must be known to the people who inhabited the country near by. As to his safety, he concluded that, were the inmates disposed to deal violently with him, he would incur just as much danger in attempting to leave as in remaining, for he could not depart without their knowledge. Moreover, in his exhausted condition, he felt that he would rather risk the consequences in the building, than again to brave the dangers and terrors of a nightly journey through the mountains. He soon fell asleep from very exhaustion.

The sun was high in the heavens when he awoke. Making as respectable a toilet as he could, considering his drenching of the previous night, he descended to the ground floor of the building. He soon came in contact with the people of the establishment, and was civilly treated, and conducted to a room of good size, where breakfast was served. There seemed to be no particular regularity or concert among the inmates in partaking of this meal. They came and went as suited their inclinations. Ladies and gentlemen lounged at the tables, sipping their coffee, and partaking of the viands languidly, indulging in a little chat, or remaining silent, as comported with their mood. Having satisfied himself with substantial comforts, Horace left the dining-room; and as he did so, he met a civil-appearing man, who politely informed him that he was welcome to remain in the establishment until he should feel rested from the evident exhaustion that he must have suffered during his previous night's wanderings in the mountains. Horace explained briefly that he had been making a short stay at one of the many boarding-houses in the Catskills, had strolled off to one of the high peaks, and become lost, and benighted in the mountains. When he spoke of the strange and apparently supernatural sights he had seen, and sounds he had heard, the gentleman's countenance wore an undefinable expression, but he did not manifest surprise or incred-

ulity. Horace ventured a few questions in regard to the existence of so luxurious a dwelling in so obscure a situation in the mountains, premising that it seemed almost like the creation of genii or fairies; but he obtained no real satisfaction as to who erected the building, or for what purpose it was built, any further than that it was resorted to by some wealthy men from a distant city. After gaining what information he could, and briefly viewing such of the rooms as he passed through, Horace walked out into the open air.

It was one of those bright summer mornings so common in mountain regions after the air has undergone the purifying influence of rain and thunder. The sky presented a pure, unadulterated blue; the foliage on the mountain sides, cleansed and refreshed by the recent rain, was of a rich green; and the mountain streams sparkled as if with diamonds washed down from the rocks. The birds sang with the sprightliness that only the feathered tribe can exhibit after a heavy rain has been followed by a brilliant clearing-up. The bees went humming about from flower to flower, adding their cheerful song of industry to the warbling of the birds.

The building stood in a most enchanting spot. To the east the mountains parted into a deep gorge, through which the morning sun streamed with all the glory and brilliancy of its summer rays. On the other hand were two other breaks in the mountains, the one gorge opening in a direction a little north of west, the other a little south of west. Thus was the building situated in a position for the inmates to witness the most enchanting effects of sunrise and sunset in the mountains.

Down each of the two gorges mentioned as opening to the west, flowed a rapid stream of water, of considerable size. A short distance to the west of the building these two streams united, and after running a short distance as one, the stream parted into two currents, flowing one to the right, and the other to the left of the small plateau on which the house stood, and a short distance below leaping in two splendid cascades down into a charming little lake of sixty or seventy acres, its waters cut into irregular shapes by the jutting mountain headlands. Thus the house stood in the centre of an island of about six acres

with a swiftly-running stream on either side, and two beautiful cascades and a lake in front. The little island on which the house stood had been partly cleared of the native forest trees, only enough having been left standing to afford ample shade. The grounds were partly kept and partly in their native wildness. As the ground descended in front of the house, it had there for a short distance been artificially formed into terraces, after which it was left in its natural state, descending rapidly to the shore of the lake. In parts of the grounds, there were walks and parterres, the latter blooming with cultivated flowers. In the uncultivated portions the wild flowers grew in their native luxuriance; and thus the wild honey-suckle, the dogwood and the countless and almost nameless flora of the woods, were brought into close contrast with the fuchsia, the aster, and the dahlia. In a spacious greenhouse were many rare plants.

Ducks, geese and swans were swimming in the lake, and fowls of various kinds were seen wandering about the grounds, or hovering around the hennerly. The notes of these, if not musical, at least helped to vary the monotony of the lonely situation. On the lake were symmetrical boats, with awnings to protect from the sun those who sought pleasure in sailing.

Proceeding from the inspection of details to the more prominent features of the landscape, the beholder could not fail to remark that the scene was one of almost incomparable grandeur. The building stood in a sort of triangular valley, hemmed in by lofty peaks, separated by the opening gorges we have mentioned. The sides of these mountains were diversified with tremendous rocky precipices, gorges, and tracts of timber. The latter consisted partly of evergreens, and partly of hardwood timber. The rich, softer green of the deciduous trees was commingled with the sombre foliage of the evergreens; and the many variations of shade imparted by the sun to the billowy sea of verdure, rendered the effect indescribable. Owing to the various and irregular positions of the mountains, as the sun poured his brilliant rays upon the landscape, some portions of it stood in deep shade, some in a shade of less degree, while some reflected the full power of the sun's fervent beams. The deep gorges reposed as under

sombre clouds, and the mountain crests looked like ridges cropping out with gold.* It was a scene for a painter.

Horace turned from the magnificent scene to an inspection of the dwelling. Though a good-sized stone building, constructed somewhat in the Gothic style, there was nothing especially formidable about its appearance. The outer walls were of stone, in the dressing of which there had been no great deal of pains taken. The doors and window-blinds, though painted to look like wood, on a near inspection were found to be iron. The blinds were made in the open, lattice fashion, like those of any ordinary dwelling. They were made with strong fastenings; and the inmates of the house at night might have plenty of air, and still feel secure that no one could readily enter the building from the outside. This might have been a necessary precaution in so lonely a place. The roof, though painted to look like slate, was composed of sheet iron plates. The building was two stories high, with sleeping apartments in the attic, and would accommodate more people than one might suppose at first sight.

CHAPTER VI.

HORACE MAKES SOME NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

As Horace leisurely inspected the premises, he was suddenly startled by a voice just over his shoulder, saying:

“My good friend, you must not be astonished at anything you see here.”

Horace turned as if he expected to see one of the ghostly crew who had haunted his wanderings on the previous evening, and after apparently assuring himself that he was addressed by a creature of flesh and blood, replied:

“No, indeed, since last night, I should not be at all surprised to see a regiment of men march forth from yonder solid precipice.”

“From what you say,” responded the stranger, “I

guess you have been favored with some of the strange sights that have been so often seen in these mountains."

"I have been living in a crowded city for a year past," said Horace, "and came out here into the mountains for the improvement of my physical health ; but I fear, when I return, I shall have need of a physician who can 'minister to a mind diseased'; for after last night's adventures, and what I have seen here, I am almost led to doubt my own soundness of mind, or to think I have been, and am still, dreaming."

"Well," said the other, "if seeing strange things in the mountains constitutes craziness, you have plenty of company in your insanity. As for what you see here, it is a solid reality, as you will willingly testify by the time you have tasted the hospitalities of the establishment for a week."

"But, how is it that such an elegantly-furnished house is found in this out-of-the-way place, which, however delightful the landscape viewed from here, is reached—at least by me—in a manner as terrific as crossing the mythological river Styx?"

"Oh! it is only a resort fixed up by some gentlemen, where they can come and rusticate and have a first-rate time during the summer months. As to the strange sights you speak of, they are not often seen, and they rather add to the novelty of the situation. Occasionally, a person or a party of two or three, will come in and report having seen the most astounding things ; and then the whole house, especially those who have never seen anything of the kind, will gather around and hear the wonderful tale, and all sorts of conjectures will be made as to the origin of the marvelous appearances. Some conjecture that there is a gang of counterfeiters here in the mountains, which I don't believe. Others regard them as spiritual manifestations, such as we have heard much of in the papers of late years. You know, spiritualists believe that certain localities are at times the especial resort of spirits, which, for reasons best known to themselves, cut up all sorts of unaccountable antics. For my part, I believe that many of these reports of strange things seen, result from the excited imaginations of those who are always ready to convert a shapeless rock or bush into a bugaboo ; or often,

perhaps, the inventions of those who like to recite a marvelous tale for the delectation of a gaping circle of listeners. Still, it must be admitted that some things have been seen here which cannot be accounted for from a human standpoint. Such, though, I believe to have been very rare occurrences."

"I," said Horace, "have been rather disposed to scout at the stories of mysterious manifestations such as have been reported from various parts of the country during the last few years. But I confess just now to being a little staggered. It certainly is admitted by all reasonable men that there are some apparently supernatural manifestations that have never been explained, but that is not saying that they never will be."

"There is," rejoined the other, "a legend extant in this section of country, that might furnish the text for many marvelous tales. It is respecting a man who lived some miles from where we are, before the Revolutionary war. He was a large landed proprietor, and in those days, as you are aware, it was a common thing to have bound white servants, who were as completely subject to their masters as were the slaves of the South before the emancipation. This man had a female servant, who, while compelled to give the employment of her hands to her arbitrary master, gave her heart to another individual. As a natural result, the girl ran away with her lover. The master pursued on horse-back, captured the girl, and tied her to his horse's tail. He then mounted his horse, and rode for home, the girl being compelled to march on behind like a captive hitched to the chariot of a Roman conqueror. A terrible fate awaited the poor girl; and a more terrible retribution was to be visited on the perpetrator of the cruel deed. The horse became frightened, ran away, and the life was dashed out of the poor captive upon the merciless rocks. The vindictive master was tried for murder, and found guilty. But owing to the wealth and influence of his family, the court was prevailed upon to postpone the execution of the sentence of death until he should reach the age of ninety-nine years. He was allowed to reside on his estate, but was condemned always to wear a cord around his neck, as a reminder of the fate that ultimately awaited

him. He was also bound to appear before the court once a year, to hear a reiteration of the sentence. It would naturally have been supposed that one with such a sentence hanging over him would have fallen into premature decay, and that the canker-worm of remorse would have eaten away the vitals of life, long before the time appointed for the ever-present cord about his neck to be tightened upon the scaffold. But he apparently lived to suffer, an outcast from society, a prey to a consuming conscience, and the recipient of spectral visitations. The night winds as they rustled about his dwelling, were laden with sad sighs; a white cow, which had been a pet of the murdered girl, would frequently be seen wandering among the rocks, and lowing mournfully, but she always vanished into air on being approached; a large dog which had often received kindnesses at the girl's hands, would frequently stand looking toward the house and howling, but those who tried to coax the animal into friendliness, found they were talking to a spectre; sometimes a maiden would be seen standing on a distant rock, with a lighted candle, singing mournfully, or uttering cries of distress; frequently a horse would be seen dashing past, dragging behind him a female, mangled and bleeding, and uttering agonizing cries for help.

"Death refused to come to the aid of the man living under the terrible condemnation; whose days were a monotonous routine of withering sorrow and remorse, and whose nights were haunted by a constant, shadowy re-enactment of scenes resembling the crime he had committed, or visitations from the spirit of the murdered girl, or the spectral appearances of the sympathizing dumb brutes which had loved her while living. The condemned man lived on from youth to middle age, gliding into the decline of life, and still the venom of remorse could not eat away his vitals, nor could his physical system be exhausted by a constant subjection to the terrors of two worlds—for it must be borne in mind that he lived on the confines of the material and the spiritual universe, subject to the shadowy terrors of the one, which ever kept before him the semblance of his wicked deed, and the real tangible terrors of the other, which ever kept about his neck the cord that was ultimately to

strangle him. Like Cain, his punishment was greater than he could bear, but there was no alternative but to bear it. The generation which had been conversant with the circumstances of the crime, passed away, and still the old man lived quiet and inoffensive, but never knowing what it was to enjoy the sympathy of his fellow-citizens. His life was an anomaly. He apparently belonged to neither this world nor the next. He could neither penetrate beyond the gloom which hedges the dark Plutonian river, nor bask in the sunshine of this sublunary abode. He was over ninety years old, and still the people thought he would reach his ninety-ninth year, when his sentence would be executed. But not only had the generation who knew intimately of his crime, as well as the Court which sentenced him, passed away; the Government of the country was also changed. The Republic had taken the place of the Colonies, and had any one been disposed to enforce the punishment, there was no Court competent to take cognizance of a sentence passed seventy-five years before. The old man finally died peacefully in his bed, at the age of more than one hundred years; and if the object of the sentence was simply punishment, the spirit of the law was certainly carried out a hundred-fold."

"But," said Horace, after listening attentively to this singular tale, "you do not mean to say that the spirits of the murdered girl, and her sympathizing cows, dogs and horses, as well as the shade of the old man, still cling tenaciously to these mountains? As for the girl, I should think that, after the old man's death, she would no longer have occasion to 'revisit the glimpses of the moon, and make night hideous' in this locality; and as for the old man, I should think he had seen trouble enough in these parts, without desiring to come back here."

"No, no, my friend," said the other, "I have no such idea. I have only related to you a legend of the Catskills as it has been told to me. Indeed, if wicked and cruel deeds cause spirits to break over the confines of the unknown world, there is abundant reason why they should appear just now. I know men who go unsentenced, unhung and unpunished—for not even their consciences seem to trouble them—whose crimes are ten-fold blacker than that of the old man mentioned in the story.

And if dark deeds cause the shades of men to walk the earth after they are dead, I know some men now living who will make first-class ghosts one of these days."

"It needs no ghost to tell us that," said Horace.

"And," said the other, "here comes a coterie, who, if their sins are a qualification, will make a lively band of ghosts for this region at some future time, should the race of Catskill shadows depreciate or run out, and need renewing."

Horace and his new acquaintance were here joined by eight or ten men, richly attired, who were evidently out for a morning walk. The foremost one addressed Horace's companion, in the mincing tones of uncertain pronunciation, affected by the city swell. A noted feature of this dialect is to leave off the "r" at the termination of a syllable or word. Another is to put a strong accent on syllables that are not properly accented. In this way the swell language has a peculiar, mincing expression, which the users of it think is very impressive and refined. Horace's companion was known as Mr. Graphic, and this name was pronounced by the swell as if it were spelled, Grawf-feek, with both syllables accented.

"Aw, Mistah Grawf-feek, a fine day foh sketching. I wondah you are not engaged with youah brush and pencil this mo'ning."

"Oh! Mr. Sindandy," replied Mr. Graphic, "I have found very agreeable employment in showing this stranger the lions, or rather the pet wolf and bear, hereabouts, and explaining, as far as possible, the whys and wherefores of things which naturally must seem strange to him."

"You say truly, Mistah Grawf-feek. It must seem odd to a strangah to find a palace hea in the mountains. But we could show him mattahs and things pahtaining to the Leech Club, much strangah than this. My friend," (addressing Horace) "did you evah hea of the Leech Club befoah?"

Horace replied that he had heard some vague reports respecting the Club, but knew little about it.

"Well, moi friend, a man who is admitted into membahship of the Leech Club, may considah his foah tune made. You might say, moi friend, that the Leech Club is the actual Govahment of the State, and it will one of

these days govern the nation. It also numbahs among its membahs some of the fi'st railroad men in the country. We have Club houses in seve'al States, both in country and in the large cities; but this one in the Catskills is one of ouah favorite summah resoahs."

"You must," said Horace, "have a mine of wealth to draw on, in order to support so many establishments, provided they are all as splendid as this one is in the interior."

"This, moi friend, is nothing. It is no moah than one of the neighbo'ing, rustic fa'm houses compa'ed to some of our city establishments. The palaces of Europe are not moah splendid. As for suppoahing them, you may well say we have a mine of wealth to draw on. I, you see, am a young man, but I have served the country and the public in seve'al diffe'ent capacities. I have been to the Legislacha, whea I made a good thing. I have had city contracts; I have acted as refe'ee in cases at law, whea the fees are la'ge; I have been connected with railroad co'porations; and you must know that such officials receive liberal compensation; for the public must pay its faithful servants. You must have observed this fact, that no class of men do so well as those who draw thea pay from the public. And the reason is clea; for whea you are wo'king for one employah, he may find time to higgle about the price; but the public consists of so many, no one is going to scrutinize things so closely. Besides, even if they pay a little too much, it is divided up among so many that no one feels it. Therefoah, we might as well have a good price when we wo'k for the public. Nothing like serving youah country, moi friend, for youah country's good, and moah especially for youah own."

"You speak," said Horace, "of having made a good thing in the Legislature. But the pay of members of that body is very small—scarcely enough to pay their expenses. I don't see how they can lay up anything out of their salaries."

Mr. Sindandy drew a long "whew!" as if in commiseration of Horace's ignorance, and said:

"I see, moi friend, you are not much acquainted with public affiai's. The stated pay of a membah of the Leg-

islacha will not pay for his segahs. If that was all he could make there, he might bettah go to the pooah-house. You fo'get that some co'poration or individual is interested in almost every bill that passes, and that it requiahs wo'k to get bills through. And do you suppose those who give thea time and influence to accomplish all this legislation, are going to do it for nothing? It is true that there are many in the Legislacha who have no influence thea, and as they can do little towa'ds aiding legislation, they obtain but little for thea services except their regulah salary. Such men don't amount to much in the Legislacha, and they soon get tired of serving there.

"It is not a man's talents so much that give him influence in the Legislacha, as it is his connections. It depends on the chain of influences he can bring to beah on legislation, how much he is to be thought of in that body. It is something, moi friend, to be a membah of the Leech Club, to have influence in the Legislacha. This Club has a hundred influences it can bring to beah on legislation. There is hardly a section of the State in which the Club does not control some interests. The membahs of the Club control railroads, and factories, and canals, and best of all, the patronage of the State. Now, suppose the Club want a bill passed. We can say to membahs from the different sections of the State: You must vote for this bill, or such and such a railroad will not be careful to serve the interests of youah constituents. The chief passenger trains will give youah place the go-by, and the local tariff of freights will be raised. We can say to othah membahs: You must vote for this bill, or such and such a factory will stop, and a la'ge numbah of youah constituents will be thrown out of employment in the dead of wintah. The Club controls so many railroads, factories, mines and othah la'ge interests, that we can bring these influences to beah. We can control men interested in banks, by promising them the State funds to deposit; and the State patronage gives us a levah with which we expect some day to move even the National Govahment. But it would take me a week to recount all the engines we have for influencing State legislation.

"So you see, moi friend, that any one who wants a

bill passed is bound to come for aid to some membah of the Legislacha who belongs to the Leech Club. No mat-tah what the bill may be, we can pass it or kill it. You may reasonably suppose that we don't give our valuable services for nothing. It is a great déal of trouble for us to go around and drum up the votes for the passage of a bill, and it is no moah than right that we should be paid for extra wo'k. While we are doing this wo'k, the othah membahs are enjoying thea ease, and it is perfectly fair that we should have extra pay, and there is nothing illegal about it.

“ You see, moi friend, that talent for speech-making is but a feathah in the scale, when weighed against the substantial influences of the Leech Club. I would rathah be able to wield the influence of this Club in ordah to carry any measha through the Legislacha, than to possess the eloquence of Webstah, Clay, Patrick Henry, and William Pitt, combined. Sometimes a man will get up in the Legislacha, and make a fine speech on some bill; and if we membahs who belong to the Leech Club are opposed to him, we laugh in our sleeves to hear him waste his breath. Aftah he gets through, we control the vote on the bill as we want it, and the speech has no moah effect than if he had spoken it heah in the mountains to the rocks and trees.

“ But I have talked sufficient to give you an idea how a man may make a good thing in the Legislacha, and still take nothing for which he does not rendah an equivalent in real honest wo'k. I will now introduce you to moi friends hea, who belong to the Leech Club. As you get acquainted with them, you will see that we do not confine ouah membahship to the higah classes. We find useful membahs in all classes of society. The main condition is that a membah shall be a representative man of his class, and be able to influence them at an election.”

Horace viewed the crowd with a quick, critical eye, and mentally came to the conclusion that these must have been admitted into the Leech Club for anything but their intellectual or moral qualifications. There were evidently among the number those who had been raised to their present elevation from the very slums of a large city, as well as those who had been fairly brought up, but were

lacking in the elements of principle and self-respect, which invest the possessor with an appearance of manly dignity. Their rich dress comported oddly with their want of moral tone, and they appeared more like a band of freebooters than men who could walk boldly through the community, unchallenged by the administrators of the law. There were Irishmen, and Germans, and nonchalant Americans among the motley crew. As Horace shook their jeweled hands, he felt as if condemned by the demon of the mountains to fondle the venomous serpents called forth from the rocky dens, hooped with diamond rings culled from their impenetrable caves. No degree of ornamentation could have rendered their touch aught but loathsome.

"Glad to see yez, Mr. Lackfathe," said Patrick O'Gull, "and hope yez may be lucky enough to git to be a member of the Lache Club, that Mr. Sindandy has been tellin' yez aboot. Faith, an' the Club has made me forchin, it has. When I comed to this blessed land of liberty, I was as poor as Father O'Flaherty's cow what depended for her livin' on the gift of paratee skins from his congregashin; and the poor baste didn't git mooch, for the papele was so poor that they ginerally ate their paratees skins and all. Yez may be sure that when I comed to this country I had to work hard till I got to be a voter, and could bring to me back in me own ward a coople hundred as good b'ys wid the ballot as ever swunged pick, or handled a shillaly in a 'lection fight. Afther a while I got in wid the Lache Club, and they got me a contract to clane the streets in the city, and I made me ten thousand dollars in three months. Sin' that I've not had to swing the pick or shovel eny more at all, for the Club has always seen to it that I've had plenty of contracts and good pay. God bless America for the free ballot, and God bless the Lache Club, what knows how to apprasheate a man that sarves them and the pooblic well."

Here Otto Swillager took up the thread of conversation, addressing Horace:

"I zay, mine frent—vat you calls him?—ah! Mr. Laghvathe—mebbe you dinks Mr. O'Kull here kets all de tings vat ams goot, as de Leege Clubs gives to de beples. Put you petter not tink zo, I dells you. Vy,

mine frent, ven I gooms from Germany, I no zo much as habs de bennies to py von glass lager. I vorks, and vorks, and vorks, and mine bocket geeps as embdy as never vas. Put pine-py I fints it pest to vills mine bocket mit votes, and den you pets I kets zelong. De Leege Club zay you zusht de man ve vants. I kets de contract, I geeps de zaloon, and I no hab to bay de licenz. I zoon fints dat de man vat garries de votes in de bocket, garries de moneys dare too. Eh!"

"Put a stopper on that rigmarole, you lager-tongued Dutchman!" said Jim Hardnuckle, a native American ornament of the worthy Club. "I thank my stars, pals, that I've not had to wade into the good graces of the Club through swill-barrels, lager-vats, gutters, and filthy snow-banks in the streets. These are the boys that have won my way to fortune,"—and he exhibited a couple of heavy-looking fists, shaking them so near the head of the Irishman, that the latter ejaculated:

"Arrah, ye blatherin spalpeen, what do yez mane?"

"No harm, Pat," said Jim. "Don't you remember the 'lection day when we cleaned out them challengers that was tryin' to bluff off from votin' the fifty emigrants just arrived from Ireland that you brought to the polls?"

"Yes, well do I, and yez behaved like a broth of a boy, as yez are, Jim."

"I reckon, Pat, you'd a' come out at the little end of the horn with your votes on that day, if it hadn't been for me and some of the other 'boys.'"

"Faith, and that we would. Ye're as yooseful as any of us, Jim."

The party had proceeded to the shore of the lake heretofore mentioned, and some of them, among whom was Mr. Swillager, were seated in the shade on the rocks which jutted into the water. Whether Jim Hardnuckle was afraid he might become rusted in pugilistic science, or whether from mere force of habit, cannot at this time be definitely known, but he indulged in another flourish of his fists, this time bringing them into unpleasant proximity to the head of the German. The latter was evidently not so much accustomed to such things as the Irishman, for he dodged and swayed so far over that he lost his balance, and turned a summersault into the lake.

A clamor of alarm was raised by the company, the geese in the lake set up a cackling, the turkeys about the premises gobbled, the dogs barked, and all was commotion where only a moment before reigned the native stillness of the mountains. However well the German might have been trained in the art of drinking lager, and carrying votes in his pocket, his education respecting water had been sadly neglected; at least in regard to keeping his head above it. It was quite plain that he had never had much to do with water, judging from his general appearance and his fat, unwieldy person. It was evident that lager was his native element, and had he fallen into a lake of that liquor, it is probable that he would soon have extricated himself by drinking it dry. But, though he may have been of sufficient capacity to exhaust the lake in his huge person, water evidently did not agree with him, and so much of it would not remain on his stomach.

Floundering about in ten feet of water, clutching above the surface as if he expected to get hold of a sunbeam and thus sustain his huge body, he seemed in imminent danger of drowning, for none of his comrades appeared disposed to soil their gaudy plumage by plunging in to his rescue. Doubtless they feared to grapple in the water with such a huge hippopotamus. Mr. Sindandy looked on in mute, helpless despair, as if already taking an inventory of the number of votes that would be lost with the German, and placing the same to the account of profit and loss. The shore, but a few feet off, was like the bottle behind the counter to the poor, penniless inebriate, suffering from the effects of a debauch. He could almost touch it, but grasp it he could not. His case was a symbol of the fate that awaited the iniquitous organization to which he belonged. While seated on a footing apparently as secure as the eternal hills, he had all at once found himself standing on what was to him the same as nothing. His inactive comrades doubtless said to themselves: It cannot be possible that he can go under with the firm rocks just at his fingers' ends! And yet he was going under before their eyes, almost within their reach. The rocks are near, but he is not on the rocks. And so it will be with you, ye false

Leech Club! you may see the firm rocks of virtue all around you, but you are not standing on them. One of these days you will find your unstable foundations all at once slipping from under you, and yourselves floundering about in an element that you know not the nature of. You will find yourselves overwhelmed by a moral flood, to which you have so long been unaccustomed that you cannot swim in it. It will matter little then to look about you and say: We can almost touch with the tips of our fingers the engines of Government, which we have so long run. It cannot be possible that we have lost our hold on these forever. See how close they are. Strain every nerve to get hold of them again. It cannot be possible that we must sink here with our feet almost on the rocks, and our hands almost grasping them. But you don't quite touch them, do you! and they might as well be a thousand miles off for all the good they do you. You might as well be struggling in mid-ocean as here with the firm ground you have walked on just beyond grasping reach, and the bottom of the lake which is engulfing you, just far enough down that your toes cannot touch it, and the friends you know, just far enough off not to be able to lend you a helping hand.

The struggling German was about sinking for the last time, and Horace and Mr. Graphic were about to rush in to the rescue, and thus do for him what his more intimate friends were too cowardly to do, when a large Newfoundland dog, which had been attracted to the spot by the splashing, plunged in, seized him by the clothing, and gave him such an impetus toward the shore, that the men standing there were able to get hold of him. He was dragged out in an unconscious, flabby condition, the starch having evidently been all water-soaked out of him. His companions immediately resorted to the most common methods of resuscitation in such cases.

"Here," said one, "is a barrel. Let's roll him on this. I guess it's an old lager-cask, and he'll be sure to smell the beer, and come to life."

In due course of time the German was restored to consciousness, and, feeling somewhat gorged with the quantity of water he had involuntarily swallowed, seemed to be in doubt whether he had just recovered from an ine-

briation caused by imbibing an extra quantity of his favorite beverage, or was suffering from some other cause. Jim Hardnuckle did not seem to be at all penitent for being the cause of the catastrophe which came so near terminating fatally, but rather felt disposed to joke about the matter.

"Well, old Sourkrout," said Jim, "I reckon you was water-logged for the first time in your life, but no one can say you was lagered."

This pun occasioned a general laugh.

"Bad cess to yez, Jim," said Patrick O'Gull, "why can't yez lave the exercisin' of them fists for the spalpeens what interfere wid 'lections by challengin' honest voters, and not be practizin' on yer friends?"

"I think," said Jim, "I've done a real service to our Christian friend, the Dutchman; for I've showed him that he can git dead drunk on water, if he only drinks enough of it; and he says that he can't drink lager enough to make him tight. After this, when he's too fur from a brewery, and wants to get on a spree, all he has to do is to make a dive into the water, and wait for some big Newfoundland dog to come and pull him out."

"You bet," said another, "he never drinks as much water as that agin unless it's forced down his throat from the hose of a steam fire-engine."

"Mine Gott, mine frents," said the German, "de tog hab more bluck dan all yous but togetter, py tam!"

"The dog," said Jim, "didn't want you to spile the water that he has to drink."

"Yes, old Limburger," said another, "I'll warrant you've spiled all the water in this pond. Don't you hear them geese swearin' at you for 'pregnatin' their drink with villainous lager and Limburger cheese? I s'pose you can understand them, for they say goose-talk and Dutch is all the same thing."

"You not know so mugh as von tam goose himself. To save a frent from trown, you not py stan."

"Oh! now, don't say you nix-fy-stan the geese. That's too thin."

"Mine Gott, vot a fool! I zay you not py stan to save von frent from trown in de trink—de vater."

"Oh! he says he wants to go to town to git a drink

of water. Why don't you take a swig from the pond? You'll find it's both victuals and drink; for it's a mixture of sourkrout, Limburger and lager."

"Oh! my, shall I pust mit mad at von pig fool!"

"Well, I declare! now he wants to go on a bust like mad, and get big and full. I thought he got full enough, and come near enough to bustin' with water."

"Mine Gott! save me from prake his head. For von shtone I shtoop."

"If soup is what you want, the pond is the place to get it. It's good 'sourkrout and Limburger soup. Take a drink of it."

"You pe von idyut. You stays here and trinks de vater you ligs. I koes to de house and trinks te prandy."

Saying this, the German gathered himself up, and trudged away in high disdain, and he was soon followed by all the company except Horace and Mr. Graphic. After the gang had gotten out of hearing, Horace said:

"I am somewhat astonished, Mr. Graphic, to find a gentleman of your appearance and tone domiciled with such a crew as those who have just taken their disagreeable presence from us."

"My friend," said Mr. Graphic, "I am an artist pursuing my vocation in sketching with brush and pencil here in the mountains. I not only have splendid natural subjects here, but also find these people an exciting study. I don't know where a man of my profession could find a more pregnant locality."

"I have," said Horace, "heard of the operations of this Club before, but was not aware that they had any such den in the mountains as this; nor that their connections were as extensive, and embrace so many classes of the community as represented by that double-distilled essence of snobbery, Mr. Sindandy."

"While there is no especial effort made," said Mr. Graphic, "to keep the existence of this Club House a secret, there is no effort made to advertise its whereabouts; and owing to its obscure position, it is comparatively little known."

"Well, Mr. Graphic," said Horace, "I have observed the corruption of mankind till I have about lost all faith in human nature. About two years ago I left my native

village, and repaired to a large city to practice my profession. This summer I came out here to spend a couple of months, thinking that a sojourn among the honest mountaineers would refresh me, and give me renewed faith in man. But what is the first discovery I make? Why, that there is an organized system of corruption in the country worse than I ever dreamed of. And that the very men who are engaged in it, instead of making it a secret, flaunt it in your face as if it were something meritorious rather than infamous. The fact that these men talk of their iniquities so openly, rather leads me to suspect that I have fallen among a lot of lunatics, who are affected with the hallucination that they are governing the State, and that all they have said are but the unreal vagaries of insanity; for it would certainly seem that men to be successful in such iniquities must necessarily be more secret about their mode of operations."

"What you have heard here," said Mr. Graphic, "is but too true; and the actors in this drama are at least sane enough to fasten themselves like leeches on the public treasury, from which they draw the funds which support their enormous extravagance. Their operations and connections are too extended to admit of secrecy. Any attempt to keep their matters from the public would surely be attended with exposure, for some one would certainly turn informer. Therefore they put on a bold front, and as nobody is under the bond of secrecy, no one has any particular object to go into exposures. Doubtless, many members of the Club regard their proceedings as perfectly right and proper, for the very reason that they are done so openly. Such a brainless fellow as that Sindandy is of much more value to the Club than a man of greater ability; for he apparently has not sense enough to distinguish between right and wrong, and he will talk of the most infamous public robberies with all the *naivete* of one who is relating some meritorious, religious enterprise in which he is engaged. Such stupendous innocence deceives more people than you dream of into an acquiescence in the idea that the infamous practices that he speaks of with such unsophisticated simplicity, are probably entirely legitimate in public affairs. I hardly

know what to think of the fellow; whether he is most knave or most fool."

"What do you think the world is coming to, Mr. Graphic," said Horace. "This deterioration of the human race is observable not only in public affairs, in which both political parties seem equally venal,—it pervades everything. It is to be seen in business, in church affairs, and in the family circle. If you employ a clerk in your store, you have to set up safeguards, to keep him from robbing you; if you are a stockholder in a bank, you are sleeping on a constant rack, in view of the probability that the cashier will embezzle the funds; if you have a competence, and invest it in real estate, you are troubled lest the rascality of public officials may leave the title imperfect. Every man apparently seems to be aiming to enrich himself by whatever means he may. No one seems to act on the assumption that his fellows will deal honestly by him from principle; and acting with this view, each seems determined to appropriate to his own use whatever comes in his way. Honesty is looked upon as lunacy. For instance, if a man through any transaction gets possession of a large amount of money which the law would allow him to keep, but which does not morally belong to him, and should he restore it to the proper owners simply on principle, he is looked upon either as a sentimental soft-head, who desires to build up a vain reputation for honesty, or else as a positive lunatic, who does not possess the right kind of faculties for a successful business man. What is called the world, cannot appreciate any act of genuine honesty, regarding it either as the vagary of a crazy man, or the hypocrisy of one who has some ulterior design, intending to profit by it in some way in the future. People appear to have no moral regard for the right of property. Indeed, except as we are absolutely protected by the letter of the law, we might as well have relapsed into barbarism; for men will appropriate to their own use everything they can; the only question arising in their minds is, not, 'Does this rightfully belong to me?' but, 'Can I hold it?'

"As regards property, the custom governing men seems to be a system of reprisals. A man loses to-day

through the sharpness of an individual with whom he has dealings, who has some advantage of him, and takes it. To-morrow the loser sees an opportunity to make up his loss by a similar act of chicanery; and it matters not that it is not the same person who fleeced him. He can make up his loss by just such a trick as was practiced on himself, and he does it. There is little doing business on the principle that those with whom we have dealings, do right simply because it is right. Each one occupies his business position as if it were a fortress, and sets up his defences on every hand. If he leaves some salient point undefended, he expects some business assailant to storm that portion of his works, and capture a part of his funds. If he escapes such a misfortune, he attributes it not to the forbearance or honesty of the one who had the opportunity, but to his want of generalship. He is constantly on the alert not only to defend his own position, but to seek a favorable opportunity to make a sortie on some weak point of an antagonist. Not only must he watch those who would assail him from without; he must be constantly on the guard against treachery in his own garrison. Just as he considers the effects of other owners his own lawful plunder, provided he can get them in a *business* way, so his own employes are apt to look upon his funds as something on which they have the privilege of foraging. By his method of doing business he has taught them that the only test of ownership is possession under circumstances that will not render them liable to be dealt with at the hands of the law. The villainy their employer teaches them they execute, embezzling his funds as remorselessly as he takes those of his fellow business men by technically-legal means.

“Observe how men violate contracts when it no longer suits their purposes to fulfill them. See, when a contract is made, how provisions are piled upon provisions in order that there may be no loophole left for either party to creep out. The most solemn obligations have no weight whatever with men who think it to their interest to repudiate a contract; provided they can do it without injuring themselves. This idea is fully recognized in making contracts; and provisions are made by which it is intended that the party who recedes shall be thrown into

an abyss or encounter a spring-gun, the discharge of which shall slaughter him. We might say that the rule governing the making of contracts, is to drive full of sharp spikes the only road over which parties have a chance to retreat, that they may be impaled in case they attempt to repudiate their obligations. Whoever, in making a contract, neglects to dig a pit, to set a spring-gun, to obstruct the retrograde path with *chevaux-de-frise*, to destroy the person who would repudiate it, only incurs the derision of his neighbors in case the compact is broken to his disadvantage.

“What a glorious world this would be if men could agree to deal with each other without this complication of chicanery. And they would be just as well off pecuniarily in the end, and infinitely better morally. The energies they expend in trying to over-reach each other, could be devoted to the legitimate improvement of their fortunes. The material they use in fortifying themselves against the rascalities which they infer their neighbors will commit upon them, because they practice just such things themselves, might be saved. There certainly would then be a greater amount of material produced; and consequently there would be more wealth in the country for men to accumulate. It could be gotten honestly with less labor than is now expended to get it dishonestly. Employes, observing a high moral tone among capitalists and owners, would fall into habits of honesty, and there would be fewer defalcations.

“But the demoralization observable in the business and political world, finds a counterpart in the social and religious community. Wives have proved false to their husbands, and husbands to their wives, to such an extent that one may be led to doubt whether there is any longer any virtue left in either sex. Religious societies have become impure; and I can hardly see what the whole world taken together amounts to, except it be a raging, seething, putrid caldron of perdition.”

Horace ceased, apparently exhausted with the workings of an agonized spirit, and Mr. Graphic said:

“Ah! my friend, what you say is true with certain restrictions; but you do not take a healthy view of matters. Things are by no means so bad as you picture them.

Look about you, and you will see that even this corrupt Leech Club, who now, in a great measure, control public affairs, find in Society a check on their iniquities; for they dare not proceed beyond a certain limit."

Horace made no reply to this, apparently having no desire to pursue the subject further, and closed by saying:

"Well, I came out here in the mountains to escape for a while the influence of the vortex of corruption, and am like the man who came down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves. I think you will prove to be my good Samaritan. I have been invited to become an inmate of this establishment for a time, and as there seems to be no escaping from the city of destruction, I might as well stop here as anywhere. I shall at least have an opportunity here of seeing how bad the very worst phase of mankind is; for I take it that none worse can be found, not even in the penitentiary."

CHAPTER VII.

A MIXED PARTY.

THE "castle" of the Leech Club was situated some three or four miles from the nearest settlements of the rural population in that region. The members of the Club had made some acquaintances among the natives. Considerable of their supplies were obtained in the neighborhood, and the people of the vicinity frequently visited the Club House to dispose of their chickens, eggs, vegetables and other articles for immediate use. The general impression prevailed among the country people that the Club House was simply the residence of some city folks, who located in that out-of-the-way place in order that they might have a quiet and cool retreat for spending the summer months. A very rough and obscure road led to the settlements, and this was known only to those who had visited the Club House for the purpose of trafficking in rural produce, or had been invited there on some fes-

tive occasion. It must not be inferred that the native inhabitants were all farmers in moderate circumstances. There were a very few men of large wealth in the surrounding country, who had grown rich in the business of tanning leather. The tannery business was at one time a large interest in that section of country; though of late years it has greatly fallen into decay, owing to the exhaustion of the hemlock bark.

The native population are quite socially disposed, meeting frequently for enjoyment at "quiltings," "apple-cuts," and other frolicsome gatherings. There are generally two or three in every neighborhood who can saw the violin, and seldom is there a considerable company together but at least one or two fiddlers will be found among the number. Though the girls may have come together ostensibly to quilt, or both girls and young men may have assembled for the seeming purpose of peeling apples, the main object is that which most concerns all young people. Should a stranger peep in at the window, instead of seeing a lot of demure young women industriously plying their needles around a quilt, or a circle of both sexes peeling and slicing apples, he will more likely see a circle standing upon the floor with hands linked, surrounding a young man and woman in the centre of the ring, their voices joining in some such chorus as the following:

Green grow the rushes, O,
Green grow the rushes, O,
Kiss her quick and let her go,
Don't muss her ruffles, O.

Then if his acoustic organs are ordinarily acute, he will hear a smack that will remind him of anything but dried apples. One of the parties is released from durance, within the girdling ring, by the magic process of a kiss, and the circle renews its rotation, this time, perhaps, singing something like the following:

Now the buckwheat's in the barn,
The best produce grows on the farm;
Now's the time for you to choose;
Now's the time to win or lose;
To get the mitten is no disgrace,
For oftentimes it's been the case.

If you were where you could hear, but not see, the performance, you might infer that the young fellow had gotten the mitten, and in a rage had attempted to fire off a pistol at some one; for you can plainly hear a noise like the explosion of a percussion cap. But don't be alarmed; the lady smiles, and the gentleman looks as though he would like to receive a pair of such mittens as that. Again the circle moves on, and you hear the following in lively chorus:

Ripest apples soon are rotten,
Hottest love is soonest cold;
Young men's vows are soon forgotten,—
Pray, pretty maid, don't be too bold.

You immediately declare to yourself that it is no rotten apple that you hear some young man smack his lips over; and that notwithstanding the caution to the pretty maid not to "be too bold," she did not hesitate to put the tempting fruit to his lips.

Keeping your place a while longer in this pardonable eavesdropping, you will hear the tum, tum, tum, of the violin, as the fiddler touches its strings, tuning it for the dance. Pretty soon you hear the "honors all," of the musician, and the scraping of the dancers as they bow to each other. Then commence the sweet tones of the violin, and the musician sings out in a clear, distinct voice: "Tops right and left," and you hear the pit-pat of the dancers' feet, and you know that they are sailing forward and backward in the exhilarating saltation.

Not the least pleasant part of the performance is the closing of the party, when the young men "go home with the girls." With only the owls and the katy-dids to witness the rapturous words of the swains, it may be inferred that there are many things said not intended for the ear of the reader. He may ask the nocturnal witnesses, but his only satisfaction from the owl will be the Yankee response of asking another question: "Who? who? who?" while the insects on the trees will give him such contradictory information as: "Katy-did, Katy-did; Katy-didn't, Katy-didn't; Katy-did, Katy-didn't; Katy-did; Katy-didn't; Katy-did, she-did; Katy-didn't, she-

didn't; I-say-she-did, I-say-she-did; I-say-she-didn't, I-say-she-didn't; she-did; she-didn't."

The reader will be but little the wiser from anything he may learn from the taciturn owl, or the disputacious katy-dids. If he wants to know whether Katy, or Mary or any of the other girls *did* consent to the proposals of their accompanying swains, he must observe the crop of weddings which the parson reaps, when "the buckwheat's in the barn."

Such are the innocent amusements of the people in that rural region. The day following one of these social gatherings, finds the young men back in the fields, attending to the crops, or "logging" on the new clearing, or in the barn swinging the flail; while the girls, who do not shirk all the cares of the household upon their mothers, are engaged in their domestic affairs, milking the cows, or making the spinning-wheel hum to supply yarn for the warm stockings and mittens for the coming winter—for the young ladies know how to give *mittens* that are pleasant to the young men, as well as some that are not.

The Leech Club delighted in astonishing the natives with a splendid entertainment. Not long after Horace had become domiciled in the establishment, preparations were made for a grand party. As the number present would probably exceed the capacity of the building, a pavilion was erected on a glade near the house. A floor was laid for dancing, and canvas was spread to keep off the night dews. An elevated platform was erected about midway of the pavilion, on one side, for the musicians.

Everything being in readiness, the country people who were invited, began to assemble early in the afternoon; for it would be dangerous traveling the mountain trail which led to the Club House in the night. They came in lumbering conveyances, such as could best travel the mountain roads; some on horseback; while others having left their teams in good care at a point where the way became most difficult, trudged the remainder of the distance on foot. Miss Shoeman, the rich tanner's daughter, and Miss Greenwood, the daughter of the rich lumberman, came together on a sort of "buckboard," drawn by a span of horses driven by an experienced mountaineer.

As the clumsy vehicle trundled over the rough trail, the young ladies danced up and down in their seat at a rate that would have put to the test the stays of tight-laced city belles. But they did not seem to mind this tossing about in the least, their rosy cheeks showing that they were inured to the rough usage of the mountain roads. On arriving at the Club House, all were provided with refreshments and comfortable quarters till evening, when the festivities were to begin.

The tall peaks around threw their giant shadows down upon the landscape; the sun retreated slowly below the western horizon, saluting the salient crests of the mountains with a radiant, farewell kiss, as he bid them good-night; and then the goddess of slumber advanced and threw her mantle over the scene, and the sombre hills around wore the appearance of repose. Now there was a blast of trumpets at the pavilion, and soon there was a swarming of people in the spacious bower, as of the gathering of many clans. They came forth from the Club House and its piazzas, and from many a cozy nook about the grounds, where they had been reposing for several hours, to join in the revelry of the evening. The gentlemen gave their arms to the ladies, and the first thing was a grand promenade up and down the pavilion.

This afforded a good opportunity for an observer to survey the company. It was a motley and heterogeneous assemblage. There were the gentlemen and ladies of the Leech Club dressed in the very gorgeousness of extravagance. Some of the gentlemen wore white pants and vests, with dark coats; others sported a dress in which the prevailing color was dark; while some were dressed chiefly in light-colored stuff—all of the richest material. Their hair and whiskers were dressed in the most elaborate manner, presenting every phase of hirsute fashion. The wearing of the mustache predominated. All these gentlemen fairly sparkled with jewelry and diamonds. There was no spot on their persons where there could be a reasonable excuse for putting some rich jewel or golden ornament, but had it.

And the ladies of the Leech Club surpassed the gentlemen thereof in richness of attire, for the reason, that

the ingenuity of the fair sex has invented more methods of heaping extraneous treasures upon their persons than men have ever yet been able to devise for loading theirs. Doubtless many ladies who have the means of gratifying this innate desire for display, have often lamented that they have not the strength of camels, to carry several hundred pounds of ornaments. If the moral worth of these Leech Club ladies had compared favorably with the pecuniary cost of their diamonds and attire, their price would have been incalculable. With their long trailing dresses, and their immense head-gear of chignons and false curls, they cut a majestic figure as they promenaded down the pavilion, hanging upon the arms of their gallants. One of the peculiarities of the fashions of this period is the excrescence of flummery attached to the back of a lady's dress just below the waist, giving it much the appearance of a hump on a camel's back.

The dress of the country people was in striking contrast with the gaudy attire of this new-fledged aristocracy from the city. The young men from the rural settlements, it is true, had on their holiday raiment; but this bore no more comparison to that of their city competitors than does the plumage of the useful, domesticated birds of the farm-yard, to that of the strutting peacock. Instead of the bejeweled, padded, laced figures of the city dandies, the country swains presented themselves in decent, but plain and often uncouth apparel, with very little attempt at ornamentation. The contrast between the city and country girls was still more marked than that between the males of the two localities. Instead of the rich, trailing robes of their city sisters, the country girls generally wore dresses in which they could walk without being in the least incommoded; and as few of them wore a great superfluity of skirts or hoops to give them a rounded appearance, their dresses hung about their persons, giving them a lank appearance; which was doubtless becoming enough in their own native fields or rustic residences, but which caused them to look like posts draped in female apparel, as compared to the walking dry-goods establishments from the city.

The promenade had continued for some time, when the musicians changed to a waltz, and the dancing commenced

without further notice. It was much as if a whirlwind had made a raid upon a laundry, snatched up all sorts of garments, including those which had been stiffened by starch, and those which were still in a limpsy condition, the commonest kinds, and the richest, indiscriminately, and set the whole into an incongruous whirl; dancing up and down, commingling in an inconceivable mixture, now moving horizontally in a body as if by some common impulse, then again rotating, then moving laterally, through and through each other, like several charging battalions which had been thrown into confusion, then separating again and joining in one furious whirl, as if actuated with a new impulse by a blast from the lungs of Boreas—till the eye grew weary of trying to discover any method in the medley. This continued till the dancers were out of breath, when they drew off to the side seats, to rest. The next dance was a quadrille, in which the country dancers were more at home.

During the evening, Mr. Sindandy made himself very agreeable to Miss Shoeman, the rich tanner's daughter; and in doing so, by no means advanced his interests in the friendship of John Woodman, who appeared to regard it as his privilege to wait upon that young lady on this occasion. Persons unacquainted with the customs of society in certain rural districts, would find it difficult to comprehend the relations between John Woodman and Miss Shoeman. Woodman was poor, being the possessor only of a small clearing, from which he had to support a widowed mother. He was much esteemed for his correct and industrious habits, much given to reading, and better informed than most of his neighbors; and Miss Shoeman regarded him with a certain degree of favor. Though her father had become a millionaire through the profits of the tanning business, he had once been as poor as John Woodman. Still, such great wealth generally begets pride, and while he looked upon John as a very respectable young man, he did not by any means regard him as a proper match for his daughter. But Mr. Shoeman, notwithstanding his wealth, retained many of his old habits of living on a sort of equality with his poorer neighbors. This was the more natural, as there were few others in the section where he lived for him

to associate with, and his family would have been nearly isolated from all social intercourse, had they not associated with those who were poor as they were once themselves. As there were no rich young men in the vicinity, it will therefore readily be seen why Miss Shoeman accepted a certain degree of attentions from John Woodman. Her father did not object to this state of things; but there was doubtless a tacit understanding between him and his daughter that there was a certain limit beyond which these attentions must not proceed. It is not improbable that Miss Shoeman had a deeper regard for John than she would have been willing to admit; for young ladies are not, like their more calculating parents, entirely guided in such matters by considerations of wealth and expediency.

The members of the Leech Club always had an eye to the main chance, and never let an opportunity slip to form an alliance that might add to their material wealth, and extend their political influence. Miss Shoeman was an only child, the heir to a large fortune; and her father was a man of considerable influence in his own county. This fact was known to Mr. Sindandy, and he determined to make the most of his opportunities. She danced with John Woodman in the first quadrille, but in the next Mr. Sindandy secured her for a partner. During the intervals in the dance, he was constantly pouring his twaddle into her ear, and this, with the flashing splendor of the dress of the swell, took amazingly with the unsophisticated country girl. The large wealth of her father, aside from a few solid home comforts, was chiefly invested in profitable real estate and bonds; on which he drew a semi-yearly interest, again to be profitably invested. She, therefore, had never before seen such splendid toilets, such magnificently-dressed gentlemen, except in one or two instances when she had visited places of amusement in the distant city, and then she had not been brought face to face with them, as on the present occasion.

"Oh! dear me, Mr. Sindandy," said Mary Shoeman, as, in the dance, one of the comet-tailed young ladies' dresses whirled up against her, almost carrying her off her feet, "if I should wear such a thing as that on my dress, I could hardly walk around, much less dance."

"Aw! Miss Shoeman," said Mr. Sindandy, "a young lady of youah beauty, gifts and wealth, should not spend her time entirely in the country, whea she has no opportunity to lea'n the accomplishments and usages of good society. With a little practice you would soon become as accomplished as any young lady you see hea."

"But," said Mary, "what do you suppose father would say to see me with such a kite's tail as that to my dress? Why, he'd ask me if that was a bob-sled I was dragging after me, to draw bark on."

"Youah fathah, Miss Shoeman, ought to take pride in seeing his daughtah dressed and accomplished as becomes her position. If you would spend the coming wintah in the city with my friend, Mrs. Grandola, I think you would nevah regret it. She is a lady of great cultivation and refinement, and undah her instructions you would profit greatly."

"My goodness," said Mary, her face brightening up as if with anticipation, "do you suppose I could ever learn to carry so much finery about with me as these young ladies do without being tripped up with it at every step?"

"Cehtainly, Miss Shoeman. I dah say that you can do many things which these young ladies cannot, which are much ha'dah to learn."

"Oh! yes," said Mary, "I don't suppose that one of them could milk a cow, or spin yarn."

By this time it became the turn of Mr. Sindandy and Miss Shoeman to lead off in the dance, while John Woodman and Phebe Greenwood, who were dancing on the sides in the same quadrille, came to a halt.

"What do you think of this company, Phebe?" said John. (Country people are not always particular to address a young lady as Miss.)

"To tell the truth, John, I don't think much of them. But I'm so bewildered that I hardly know what to think. What's your opinion, John?"

"I think that Mr. Sindandy, there, will some day reach a high position."

"How, a high position, John?"

"I think he's bound to be elevated by the hangman."

"Oh! John, I see what's the matter: you're jealous because he's dancing with Mary Shoeman."

"I think better of Mary," said John, "than to believe that she could be taken up with such a brainless dandy."

"John," said Phebe, "do you know how I feel in this crowd? I feel just as though I was in a den of robbers such as I have read about in story books; who live in the grandest manner on what they get by robbery."

"I guess you are not far wrong," said John, "judging from an account I heard Mr. Sindandy give of his gang, which he calls the Leech Club."

"What, John, you don't really mean to say that we are among a gang of robbers away off here in the mountains?"

"Not exactly in the sense that you mean, but robbers after all; but I don't mean that we are in any personal danger."

Phebe seemed to be reassured by this statement, though she instinctively nestled closer to John. And now they dashed off in the dance, and their conversation ended for the present.

As soon as the quadrille was finished, Mr. Sindandy managed to introduce Miss Shoeman to Mrs. Grandola, having previously given that excellent lady the cue in regard to what he wished her to say to the country girl.

"My dear," said Mrs. Grandola, "I am charmed with you. If I could only have you in the city with me for a month or two, with an occasional hint from me, you would become as accomplished and fascinating as any young lady you see here. The stuff is in you, and you only lack opportunity to develop your powers."

If Miss Shoeman had been a little better acquainted with the world, and been able to distinguish true culture and refinement from the most tawdry and vulgar display, she would have regarded the intimation that she might become as accomplished as the ignorant, besotted throng before her, as anything but a compliment. But the glare of diamonds and jewelry and the sea of rich robes, overpowered her understanding; and had an ape, or a gorilla, or an orang-outang, or even a donkey, appeared upon the scene dressed in the exquisite style of the males of the Leech Club, or the trailing flummery of the females thereof, she would have taken it for granted that the ornamented monstrosity was a fine gentleman

or lady. She would have waltzed with Satan himself, had his cloven hoof been ornamented with such a splendid slipper as that of Mr. Sindandy, and his horns hooped with diamond rings such as glittered on that exquisite's fingers, and never would she have suspected that the Evil One was other than a member of the Club in good standing. Mary flushed up with evident pleasure at the compliments of Mrs. Grandola, and said:

"I would dearly like to learn something of city life with you, if father could spare me for awhile. I think I could then go back home and teach our homespun neighbors a little refinement."

"To be sure you could, my dear," said Mrs. Grandola. "You could return and be the reigning belle of the whole county. And what splendid entertainments you could give; and you could always have a number of brilliant stars from the city at your parties; for you would soon form an extensive acquaintance. And it would add amazingly to the influence of your family. A man of your father's wealth, my dear, ought to be a member of Congress; and who knows but he might be Governor of the State, if he would only use the means at his disposal. Many a man has become prominent in politics through the agency of a beautiful and accomplished daughter. And then," Mrs. Grandola added in a lower tone, "such a splendid husband as you might get, my dear. What would you say to Mr. Sindandy?"

Mary blushed diffidently, as if to say, "Oh! dear, I could not expect to look as high as that."

There was one person in the company who evidently did not enjoy himself. Mr. Flitaway had protested from the first against building the pavilion outside of the charmed circle of the streams of water which surrounded the Club House, saying that the company would surely be disturbed by the ghosts of the Catskills. At first Mr. Flitaway joined in the festivities; but after a while he declared in an undertone to some of his intimate friends, that he occasionally saw a hideous looking object, who was evidently not among the invited guests, glide almost imperceptibly into the pavilion when a waltz was in progress, while the dancers were too much engaged to notice the apparition, waltz across the floor among the

crowd, pass out of the pavilion on the other side, and disappear. Horace Lackfathe, who danced but little, was generally observing the dancers from a side seat, and Mr. Flitaway went and sat beside him. Mr. Flitaway told his story to Horace, but the latter rather expressed the opinion that it was some sort of optical delusion. The apparition did not seem to trouble any one but Mr. Flitaway, and therefore he could make no one believe that he saw anything unusual. Finally, however, he was able to point it out to Horace as it went almost like a flash across the floor among the waltzers. It had only appeared, according to Mr. Flitaway, during a waltz, when a sort of confusion prevailed, and it would not be so apt to attract attention. Whatever it was, it seemed to take especial pains to show itself to Mr. Flitaway. Horace observed that, in passing out of the pavilion, it caused the boughs which formed the sides of the bower to part, and he thought he heard a rustling among the bushes, as of some one running away. A feeling of relief came over him; for he reasoned that a ghost could make no impression on material objects, not even on so slight a substance as a green bough; therefore the strange object must be a creature of flesh and blood. This sort of reasoning, however, does not comport with the spiritual stories that have become common in these latter days.

It was drawing toward the time for supper; and the last dance before sitting down to the sumptuous refreshments was to be a Virginia reel. Two long lines of dancers were formed the whole length of the pavilion, the ladies in one line, the gentlemen in the other, the two facing each other. The incongruous elements of the company were here brought together in contrasts and encounters that were calculated to excite the risibilities of an observer.

The music struck up, and first a young countryman in his homespun habit, and a city young lady in rich trailing robes, from opposite ends of the two confronting lines, went charging at each other like two skirmishers of separate hostile armies preparatory to the conflict, the main forces standing, and calmly viewing the procedure, as if to say, "our turn will soon come." The two skirmishers

did not rush furiously at each other like the mail-clad knights of old, but came corveting, dancing, slowly, as if mounted on gay steeds, such as we have all seen proudly bearing militia officers in holiday uniform in a Fourth of July parade, prancing at the head of a procession. But if the two initiatory skirmishers came slowly, more terrible was the encounter when they met. Their mission was apparently simply to meet, cross swords, return and report to their respective forces. But the young lady in wheeling "about face," must necessarily impart an impetus to her train that would place it in the rear. In doing so, she gave it such a flop that it wound completely around the legs of the young man. Having thus his organs of locomotion in chancery, he was, as we might say, unhorsed, and brought flat on the floor; and as the lady now had an appendage to her train which was not placed there by the *modiste*, and much more than she was ever calculated to draw, was also, so to speak, floored, and both skirmishers were placed *hors de combat*. Other light troops rushed to the aid of the discomfited ones; the young man on being released from duance, was found to have suffered no serious wounds, nor the young lady either; but she had a much damaged trail.

This circumstance afforded considerable merriment among the country people, and such as were standing together so as to be able to converse without being overheard by their city friends, cracked a good many jokes on the contretemps.

"Jim," said one, "is good at startin' a deer from cover, but he got on the wrong trail that time."

"The trouble is," said another, "that Jim is more used to follerin' deer than foxes. He ain't up to all the twistins and turnin's of them sharp animals."

"That trail," said another, "is so completely wiped out, I don't believe a dog, or even an Injun, would think of follerin' it now."

"Don't be uneasy," said another, "there'll be enough that'll hunt up the game, even if the trail is lost."

"You think, then," said another, "that a fox is worth huntin' even after the hide is all torn off. Why, man,

you can't eat 'em ; I wouldn't give two cents for the animal without the fur."

"Oh! Bill," said the other, "that's rather too bad. Didn't you see how lovin'ly that city chap took her up. I don't doubt but he'd liked to took a taste of her; though as for the eatin', he might find her a tough morsel before he got through."

"Thinks I to myself," said the other, "when I seen that city gal hitch on to Jim with her ropes, you're in for it now, old boy. She's goin' to snake you along just like we haul a log out of the woods. But her ox-chain wasn't strong enough. Sich flimsy tacklin' may do to rope in one of them dandified city chaps, but you can't tow a country feller along with such weak gear."

"True as preachin'," said the other; "I reckon Jim would be towed along a good deal faster by Sallie Goodsel's calico apron strings, than the fudgery of that city miss."

Each party having carried off its wounded, sent each a new skirmisher prancing through the center, and this time, luck would have it, both were natives to the manner born, and accustomed to the mountain warfare. They danced down and back without any mishap, showing how much more effective provincial troops are for certain kinds of service than regulars. In our early Colonial times, the British General Braddock was defeated by ignoring his provincial allies.

A Virginia reel is one of the most exciting and amusing of country dances, when participated in by those who are unencumbered by a superfluity of dress to impede the maneuvering. After the mishap mentioned, the dance proceeded, the city girls certainly displaying commendable skill in engineering their trains, and keeping them from being smashed by the bipedal locomotives. But notwithstanding the vigilance of the fair engineers, there was occasionally a train telescoped and thrown from the track. The countrymen avoided the trails of the ladies as they would, when not armed with their trusty rifles, shun the trail of a panther in the forest.

The whole set had just completed the grand movement of marching and counter-marching, coming to a halt in two lines facing each other, as at the beginning;

when they were treated to an exhibition that struck the whole company with consternation. A hideous looking object, in appearance, part man, part demon, came spinning almost like a flash down between the two lines of dancers, so near that it almost brushed their clothing. The apparition brought with it a blast of air cold as from the icy caves of the mountains; described by those who felt it as striking a chill to their very bones. The faces of both men and women blanched with terror, and amid the wildest shrieks the dancers scattered from their places. The apparition in a twinkling passed out of the pavilion, and so great was the consternation of the company that pursuit was hardly thought of. The only one who retained his presence of mind was Horace Lackfathe. He had seen the apparition, whatever it was, before, and had been studying on it. With a speed only less than that of the nocturnal visitor he pursued. He at least discovered that it had not dissolved into thin air immediately on leaving the pavilion; for he saw it, by the dim light of the moon, making undiminished speed toward a perpendicular ledge of rocks. Urged on to superhuman exertions by the hope of discovering the key to this mystery, Horace flew like the wind after the retreating apparition. He gained on it; its speed appeared not to be so great as at first. How Horace went at such speed over such rocks, and through bushes without being tripped and bruised, he could never afterwards tell. In the furious excitement of the chase, he felt no exhaustion, nor looked upon the ground he trod. Had there been a deep abyss before him, he would have dashed into it, for his eye was fixed only on the fugitive figure. Now he can almost touch it, and he feels certain that it cannot escape him, for just before is an unbroken, impassable ledge of rocks. Straining every nerve, Horace's right hand grasps a revolver in his breast pocket, ready for an encounter should the fugitive show resistance. The sharp click of the lock, as Horace cocked the pistol, must have caused the nerves of the apparition to quake, provided it had any fears of leaden bullets. But Horace does not fire; he feels certain that his game will soon be driven to the wall, when he will capture it alive. He has for two or three minutes been on the point of grasping the fugi-

tive, but always finds it just out of his reach. Now he throws all his force into a furious bound forward; he fairly flies, and catches the garments of the apparition—he has it—no, it is but some leaves from a bush that his hand comes in contact with. On, on, rush pursued and pursuer like shooting stars ricocheting over the sombre leath. And now the crisis is at hand. The perpendicular ledge of rocks is not ten feet off, and the apparition plunges into a thick clump of bushes at the base of the precipice. Horace rushes in without the least hesitation. The bushes would not more than afford cover for three persons, and surely Horace can have no difficulty in laying hands on the fugitive. He clutches around wildly among the bushes. He has embraced the whole space with his encircling arms, but with the exception of drawing the brambles to his breast, he might as well have clasped the empty air. He rakes the circumscribed space with the drag-net of his arms, and finds it like fishing in the Dead Sea. He obtains no food for the curiosity of his starving soul by dipping his net in such an unfruitful conservatory. Having satisfied himself that there was nothing in the bushes, and that there was no method of escaping through, or climbing the precipice, he stepped back a few paces. There on top of the ledge, out of his reach, sat the object of his pursuit.

“Man, ghost or devil,” said Horace, aiming his revolver at the apparition, “stir not a peg, or the contents of these six chambers will verify whether you are proof against gunpowder and lead!”

“Presumptuous young man!” said the strange object, “you might as well discharge your weapon at the unsubstantial air. Be thankful that I have spared your life. Know you not that I might have led you to death twenty times during your mad pursuit. Had I turned a little from the course, you would have been led over a precipice and dashed to pieces. Return to your friends, and try not to pry into mysteries that are not for such as you to know.”

“Who, and what are you,” said Horace, “that prowls about in hideous masquerade, frightening the ignorant with your vain mummery? I will teach you a lesson that will be a warning to impostors. Now, come down

from that perch and surrender yourself, or I will see what effect cold lead will have on your ghostly person."

"As for what I am, young man, it is enough that I am nothing that you can harm, or that wishes to harm you or yours."

"If you have no intention to do harm, why do you intrude in hideous attire into a festive company, frightening frail women into hysterics, and marring the pleasure of those who would enjoy themselves?"

"Ask the thunder, which in terrific volume, often reverberates through the recesses of these eternal rocks and hills, why it does not cease its rolling because, perchance, frail mortals will be frightened at the voice of supernal power! I am but fulfilling my destiny, and those who do not like my presence, must not invade my dominions, to practice a round of licentiousness as hateful to the powers of these secluded mountains as my own presence seems to be to those immoral revelers. I trouble no one who does not come to corrupt the ancient customs of these hills."

"You certainly seem to be a religious demon. You may consider it your duty to break up any party of pleasure that sees fit to visit what you are pleased to call your realm. But if you don't come down from there without further parley, I fire."

"Young man, I could in an instant summon a legion to my aid that would make you quail. But I spare you. Those whom I trouble are licentious invaders, whose cause I charge you not to embrace, if you are not one of their number."

"Once more, I say, come down from there as you went up, or I fire."

A hollow laugh, which the gorges and caverns of the mountains seemed to take up, and re-echo, till it appeared like rumbling thunder, was the only reply. This was followed by the quick report of Horace's pistol, three barrels being fired in quick succession. For an instant Horace was blinded by the smoke; the owls were startled from their roost, and set up a promiscuous hooting, while a hundred echoes from the rocks might have created the impression that the apparition had summoned a legion of his followers, each discharging a pistol at his assailant.

But as the smoke cleared away, Horace saw nothing but the bare rock where the strange being had sat. He was about to turn and depart, when his attention was attracted to another part of the ledge. There he saw the apparition standing. With a wave of the hand it exclaimed:

"Begone! begone! I spare you!" and immediately disappeared.

Horace now started to regain the Club House. He was confounded at the difficulty and danger of the way. He wondered how he had passed over the ground at such inconceivable speed, without falling into frightful chasms on every hand, and being dashed to pieces. He was struck with the recollection that the strange object had told him that it might have led him off precipices to his destruction. With careful climbing and feeling his way, he finally reached the house; strange to say, not having received a bruise or a scratch.

When Horace reached the pavilion, he found the company recovered from their fright. Some of the stronger minded men and women of the Leech Club try to sooth the excited nerves of the company by making light of the occurrence, expressing the belief that the apparition was nothing more than the wanton freak of some monomaniac dweller in the mountains. As Horace had not been missed from the company, he said nothing about his strange adventure, not desiring to excite the fears of the ladies. It was now about midnight, and the company was about to adjourn to the Club House for supper. This necessitated a brief walk in the open air, and many looked suspiciously around as they traversed the short distance between the pavilion and the Club House, as if they expected to see a goblin spring from under every bush. But if there were any such in the vicinity, they did not make their presence known, and nothing further occurred to disturb the excited nerves of the company.

Seated at tables glittering with costly plate, and loaded with choice viands, all apparently forgot the late unwelcome visitor in the discussion of the more substantial comforts set before them. There were disappearances almost as remarkable as that of the mysterious stranger; but no one seemed to be alarmed that such good things were constantly getting out of sight, nobody could say

how. No one appeared to be frightened at the sight of even spirits disappearing with the more tangible and solid articles of the feast. It was quite evident that some were determined so thoroughly to familiarize themselves with spirits that no sudden apparition would hereafter frighten them. And as the feast progressed, and course succeeded course, and the sparkling wines flowed freely, the company became jovial, apparently caring so little for the presence of spectres that they were determined to leave but the ghost of what was on the tables and in the larder, and only the ghost of a chance for those who might be so unlucky as to come after them.

However fortified they were by the good cheer of the tables, no one proposed to go again into the pavilion; and plays and dances were commenced in the Club House, and kept up till the glow on the eastern mountain peaks told that the earth had completed half a revolution since the festivities had commenced, and that the sun would soon greet the rugged scene around with his morning salutation. Many had, however, at different times, retired to rest, and before day had fully broken, all had sought couches which had been improvised for the occasion, and all about the weird mansion was still.

It was middle of the forenoon before all had arisen, and partaken of the morning meal. After they had been duly refreshed, the country people prepared for their journey homeward. It was observed that John Woodman, who, on the arrival of the cavalcade at the Club House on the previous evening, had assisted Miss Shoeman from her rude vehicle, did not aid her in departing. Mr. Sindandy performed that office, and Mrs. Grandola was present, and with a superfluity of kisses and flattery, bade her good-bye. John Woodman, however, had the honor of waiting on Miss Greenwood, who rode with Miss Shoeman, notwithstanding the elegant Mr. Flitaway was anxious to tender his services. Miss Greenwood steadfastly ignored his advances, and accepted the proffered assistance of John.

The country people were now on the way to their homes, and the inhabitants of the castle were at liberty to comment as they liked on their rustic guests. So far as real, honest intelligence might be the criterion of judg-

ing between the two classes, the country people would have stood much the highest in the estimation of a philosophical observer; but if a knowledge of the ways of the world should be taken as the measure, then of course the city people would have been considered a little ahead.

After the country people had departed, they were the subjects of considerable comment among the inhabitants of the castle. There were angry strictures on their awkwardness, sneers at their want of breeding, and commiserations on their ignorance of the usages of *good society*. To hear these urbane people deprecate boorishness, a stranger who did not scrutinize their manners too closely, would never have supposed that most of them had come up from slums and cellars, to roll in redundant wealth.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. SINDANDY AND MR. FLITAWAY RUSTICATE AMONG THE NATIVES.

THE intimacy between John Woodman and Miss Shoeman was brought to a sudden termination. Not long after the party given by the Leech Club, John called at the house of the rich tanner, but was received so coolly by his daughter, that these visits were discontinued. There had never been anything more than a friendly intercourse between the young people; but this, under favorable circumstances, might have ripened into something warmer. How many such intimacies are there in every community where no promises have been made, no troth plighted, and yet one or the other or both of the parties considered it much more than a mere affair of ordinary friendship! The most exalted cases of love between the sexes are those in which a word on the subject has never been spoken, and which never reach the consummation of unity in marriage. The deepest pathos of the poets is found in those productions where-

in the muse sings of affection unrequited, or that in which cruel destiny forever bars the union of the lovers. There is something so common-place about getting married that, though it is doubtless the *finale* devoutly to be wished for, it takes away a portion of the enchantment, the fruition, of love in which the parties have learned just not enough of each other to know that both are but human. It is said of pleasant dreams, that no person ever experienced the conclusion of one before awaking. He either awakes before completing the dream, or else it is turned off into some other channel before he reaches the delightful goal. It is so with day-dreams. Our pet theories, our visions of ambition, our well-laid plans for amassing wealth, our affairs of love, dissolve like the mirage of a dream as we approach their consummation. We find like children seeking the fabled silver spoon at the end of the rainbow, that the volatile splendor recedes as we chase it.

John Woodman did not appear to take to heart the cool treatment he received from Mary Shoeman. He had entertained for her a regard stronger than that of ordinary friendship; but the feeling had not taken deep enough root to cause him to repine when she rejected his attentions for one whom he despised as a strutting coxcomb. Mary had been completely dazed by the splendors of the Leech Club; and in her vain and inexperienced estimation, the tawdry men and women of that establishment appeared as the very paragons of gentility. Had Mary discarded John for one of his own fellows, one who had been brought up as he and she had in the rustic fashion of the country, he would have taken it more to heart. But he looked upon her favoring such a man as Sindandy as evidence that she lacked real worth, and was of a vain and fickle constitution. When we find some cherished fruit that we have been carefully preserving, eaten away by canker-worms and rotten at the core, we may indeed feel disappointed at our loss, but we no longer retain the corroding treasure in our choice casket. We throw it out to be appropriated by such as feed on garbage as their natural sustenance.

Moreover, John Woodman had found in Phebe Greenwood a more congenial *friend*. She held Mr. Sindandy

and his clique in contempt at least as great as that in which they were regarded by John. It is astonishing how soon, under some circumstances, the Romeos find their Juliets. Having loved unavailingly, they come across a congenial spirit, and their affections are transferred with tenfold force to the new object. Nor is this an evidence of fickleness. As well say that a magnet is fickle because it no longer points to a substance which has freed itself of what little properties it had of attracting it. Few marry those for whom they first cherished a regard. Love is more an experiment than an instinct. Often young people imagine themselves in love, until some circumstance reveals the fact that their tastes and inclinations are totally at variance, and they gradually separate and gravitate toward those with whom they possess an affinity.

John Woodman had discovered that he and Phebe Greenwood at least agreed in despising the sham gentility and exaggerated display of the Leech Club; and thus they met on sympathetic ground. Whether their sympathies were to ripen into something more than friendship, time must show. Their conditions in regard to probable worldly possessions were as widely apart as those of John and Miss Shoeman, for Phebe Greenwood's father was also rich. He had, like Mr. Shoeman, commenced poor, and grown rich through a profitable trade in lumber. He had, like Mr. Shoeman, but slightly changed his method of living; and only those who knew him would have supposed that his circumstances were greatly different from those of his rural neighbors. His family associated with the surrounding community with as little restraint as if they only possessed an ordinary farm and a single saw-mill, instead of owning large tracts of land in two or three counties, and saw-mills on many streams.

Mr. Sindandy, Mr. Flitaway, Mrs. Grandola, and others of the Leech Club, had received an invitation from Mary Shoeman to visit her father's house. A couple of weeks after the grand party mentioned, the two gentlemen referred to, drove up in a buggy at the unpretending residence of Mr. Shoeman. They were cordially received by Mary, their horses cared for, and soon they were making themselves agreeable to the family in their own peculiar

style. They were domiciled for a visit of several days; and as their earliest associations, before they profited by the beneficence of the Leech Club, were of a plainer nature than even the poorest of the rural population of that section, they found no trouble in making themselves at home at the rustic dwelling of the tanner. Though their present equipments, and dandified appearance, were as much out of place in that atmosphere as finely-dressed monkeys would be in the wilds of Africa, where such finery had never been imported, still they had known what it was in childhood to dine on cold victuals contributed from some hospitable kitchen. It may therefore be fairly inferred that they were subject to no great hardship in having to breakfast on fried pork, ham and eggs, with "warmed-up" potatoes, and coffee; to dine on pork and beans, green corn, apple dumplings, and pumpkin pies; the whole washed down by pure cold water from the spring, instead of sparkling wines; and to sup on mush and milk, bread and butter, sweetmeats, plain cake, and a cup of tea.

After they had been a couple of days at Mr. Shoeman's and had gotten on terms of intimacy with the family, Mr. Sindandy struck out in his own peculiar vein, edifying their rustic acquaintances with the high-toned ways of the world in which he and his companion moved. Mr. Flitaway said but little, apparently serving only as a sort of tender to Mr. Sindandy, always ready to confirm any statement made by that worthy.

"Aw! Mistah Shoeman," said the exquisite, "I wondah you don't emba'k in politics. A man of youah wealth and ability should at least control the county wheah he resides."

"I am on the wrong side," said Mr. Shoeman; "the party that I belong to is in the minority in this section of the country."

"I see," said Mr. Sindandy, "you don't know the ways of the political world. Why, sir, youah wealth would elect you on any ticket."

"Oh! no, sir," said Mr. Shoeman, "you mistake the independence of the country people. Although I give employment to hundreds of men, the most of them differ

in politics with me, and they would not vote for me if I was running for office."

"Aw! Mistah Shoeman, you don't know all that men will do for a considahation."

"But, do you mean that I should resort to bribery to get into office?"

"By no means. Go around among the most influential men. Tell them that you would not think of such a thing as buying thea votes; that you know they don't diffah with you materially, and that you feel suah they will help you as a friend; that you want them to canvass around among thea friends for you, and that you know they cannot affoahd to spend their time for nothing. Tell them to draw on you for whatevah may be necessary to pay them for thea time. To some you will have to give fifty dollahs, some a hundred dollahs, and some, pe'haps, even as high as a thousand dollahs. Nevah feah but they will go right away to work for you for such good pay, and will no moah feel that they are bribed than if you should hiah them as traveling agents to sell youah leathah.

"The figures I named of fifty, a hundred and a thousand dollahs, are the highest you will have to pay. You can go around among the poorer class, and say to them also that you would not think of trying to buy thea votes, but that you know they will help you as a friend. Ask them to canvass a little for you among thea acquaintances, and say you know that they have families to suppoah, and they cannot affoahd to lose thea time, and that you will give them five dollahs, ten dollahs, fifteen dollahs apiece, according to circumstances. Pretty soon you have got everybody to work for you, and no one is bribed.

"We membahs of the Leech Club always manage things without bribery. We nevah fail to get men to do what we want them to for a considahation, and we nevah bribed a man yet. We also get pay for ouah own honest labors in the Legislacha and elsewheah, and never accepted a bribe in ouah lives."

But for the unsophisticated audacity of Mr. Sindandy in laying down this remarkable code of political ethics, Mr. Shoeman would have immediately seen through the undisguised rascality of this method of manipulating an

election. But Mr. Sindandy was such a pink of perfection—having gained the unqualified admiration of Miss Shoeman, and consequently of her mother—that Mr. Shoeman was actually wheedled into the blindness of his wife and daughter; who would have been astonished at nothing promulgated by the splendid, immaculate, infallible Sindandy; even had he told them that a common and legitimate amusement of his city friends was to set fire to a few blocks of houses, and, like Nero, keep time to the roaring conflagration by music and dancing. Mr. Shoeman remained silent for a little while, as if digesting the astonishment that had at first overpowered him at the thought that such practices could be right and proper, and then remarked:

“But, Mr. Sindandy, the method you speak of would cost an immense pile of money—many times what the office would be worth.”

“Nevah feah for that,” said the worthy expounder of ethics. “When you get to the Legislacha, you will find men who are willing to pay you to work for them, just as you have paid men to canvass for you; only they will pay you much highah. Why, it is nothing for a membah of the Legislacha to make ten thousand dollahs in a single day, and earn it too. Suppose you spend fifty, or a hundred thousand dollahs to be elected. I will guarantee that you shall have the money all back and moah besides, the first term you serve in the Legislacha.”

Mr. Shoeman was utterly confounded at these statements. Could it be possible that such things were practiced, and that they were perfectly legitimate? It must be so, for the excellent, the elegant Mr. Sindandy, whom Mary and her mother regard as the paragon of refinement and morality, speaks of these practices with as little reservation as Mr. Shoeman would of a good operation in leather.

“And,” continued Mr. Sindandy, “Mrs. Shoeman and her daughtah will have the benefit of residing part of the season at the Capital, which will be a great relief from the humdrum life of the country.”

“Oh! yes, father, that would be so nice!” said Mary.

“And,” said Mrs. Shoeman, “though I used to think we had a very pleasant home here, since I have heard

Mr. Sindandy tell about the fine things in the city, and how members of the Legislature are always called the Honorable Mr. So and So, and their wives the Honorable Mrs. So and So, I begin to think this a dull place, and want to see a little of the gay world. I'm sure we can afford it, and then Mr. Sindandy says we won't lose anything, but will rather make money by your going to the Legislature."

This was a clincher. Sindandy was the serpent that had entered that paradise, and Mrs. Shoeman was re-enacting the part of her ancestor, Eve. If Mr. Shoeman does not fall, he is not a true descendant of Adam.

Mr. Greenwood and Mr. Shoeman were neighbors, and there was considerable intercourse between the two families. In this manner Mr. Sindandy and Mr. Flitaway managed to get an introduction at Mr. Greenwood's. Mr. Flitaway exerted himself to obtain a footing there, but he received no encouragement from Phebe. Her father and mother, owing to the fact that he was endorsed by the Shoeman's, and doubtless a little taken by his splendid make-up, were disposed to look upon him with some degree of favor; and but for this fact, Phebe would hardly have treated him with civility. She preferred the companionship and good sense of John Woodman to the mincing flattery of the fop. Many was the rating which Phebe received from her friend, Mary Shoeman, for neglecting so favorable an opportunity to capture the splendid and wealthy city gentleman, and wasting her time with a penniless young man like John Woodman. Mary intimated that John might do well enough to help pass the time away when the neighborhood was not graced by a couple of elegant gentlemen, the likes of whom were seldom seen; but to let such a rare chance slip! How could Phebe be so preposterous?

Sindandy and Flitaway, during their stay in the country, took immense pleasure in astonishing the rustics. Dressed to the killing height of the fashions, glittering with diamonds and gems set in gold, they condescended to attend the rustic parties, to dance with the country girls in their plain calico dresses, and to shake the toil-hardened hands of the country swains. The two swells were the observed of all observers. The country girls

were, many of them, as proud of dancing with the magnificent strangers as are some city belles to waltz with a prince of the royal blood, who may visit the new world. Nor is this said to their discredit. They had not seen such large quantities of the much-counterfeited coin called gentility, as to be able to detect the real from the spurious article. It is to be feared that some of them will learn too late that the glitter of highly polished brass is often greater than that of native gold, which has not undergone the refining process of the crucible.

We will now for a time leave Mr. Sindandy and Mr. Flitaway to their devices, while we return and see what is going on at the castle of the Leech Club.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HERMIT OF THE CATSKILLS.

HORACE LACKFATHE and Mr. Graphic were walking about the precincts of the castle one fine morning, when they fell in with an old resident, and native of the Catskill region, who had for some time been employed about the Leech Club establishment. Horace and his companion, naturally anxious to obtain information respecting this strange region, engaged in conversation with the old mountaineer. After some pumping, the old man saw that they were pleased to listen to him, and he became perfectly communicative. After relating various anecdotes, and describing many remarkable features of the mountains, he told them of a strange inhabitant, who made his home in the deep, dark gorges of the mountains; no one knew exactly where. Reduced to modern English the old man's story was as follows:

About three years ago there appeared in these mountains a man of middle age, dark skin, straight black hair, and features different from those of any race of men that the people here were accustomed to see. What was at first supposed to be a deformity of face,

was finally decided to be the natural features of the aboriginal race, and the stranger was considered to be of Indian origin. No one had ever been able to discover his exact abiding place ; but that such a person did live in the mountains was known from the fact that he had been met, and conversed with by hunters ; who represented him as educated, and speaking good English. He invariably disappeared into the recesses of the mountains after holding the briefest interview with those who accidentally encountered him.

One story of his origin was that he was a descendant of the original Indian owners of the soil ; that the remnant of his tribe had removed to the far West many years ago, and that he had returned to visit the graves of his ancestors. Some believed that he was the ghost of a great Indian, and that he had a whole tribe of aboriginal spirits at his command. Others who did not exactly accept the ghost story, still believed that he had a sort of connection with the goblins of the mountains, and that he could at any time bring them forth at his beck and call—that while he was in reality a being of flesh and blood, he was a sort of connecting link between the real and the unreal world. It was believed that he not only commanded the shadowy representatives of the red men who inhabited this region ages ago ; but that the spirits of the more recently departed white men also recognized him as a leader. It was also believed that, though partaking of the nature of this world, having a physical form like other men, he still so far partook of the unsubstantial nature of his shadowy followers, that he could at any time vanish like the shadow of a cloud. The philosophy of those who held this theory, did not extend so deeply as to prompt them to explain what became of the physical frame of the dual being, when he dissolved into nothing.

As to the ability of the ghostly followers of this strange denizen to act on physical substance, there seemed to be a dispute. All apparently admitted that a spirit could not of itself move the slightest atom of matter, and consequently could not do the least personal harm to a human being. But many contended that the ghostly legion could act on matter through the physical

agency of their human representative, the strange Hermit of the Catskills; that this mysterious individual, backed by his legion of goblins, possessed superhuman power to move from place to place like a flash; and that under such circumstances he was a match for a troop of mortals armed with the weapons of this world. It was, however, generally believed that he and his ghostly crew possessed no power to injure those who did not interfere with them in their wanderings through the mountain solitudes, or wantonly invade the deep, dark gorge where they held their habitation.

On hearing this curious story, Horace was immediately impressed with the idea that the subject of it must be one and the same as the apparition which had caused such consternation in the pavilion on the night of the party. Horace felt an irresistible desire to explore the mountains, and fathom this mystery. He could not prevail on the old mountaineer who related the story, to accompany him on such an exploring expedition. The latter would readily have joined him in a hunt, had the game been panthers or catamounts; but goblins were entirely out of his line. Nor could the old man give him any definite information respecting the residence of the dreaded Hermit, except that he had been most frequently seen in a certain deep, gloomy gorge; dark with the shades of gigantic trees; bounded by impassable precipices; strewn with a *debris* of boulders; with a boisterous stream of water running down the center. It was situated several miles from the castle.

A day or two afterwards Horace proposed to Mr. Graphic an excursion to the gorge mentioned as the probable residence of the strange hermit. Mr. Graphic was not possessed of the feverish anxiety of Horace to unravel the mysteries that had environed the castle; but he was not superstitious; and as the remarkable ravine mentioned, promised rare work for his brush and pencil, he readily consented to the expedition. With two or three days' provisions, two revolvers each, and a couple of blankets, they started for the Plutonian valley.

The old mountaineer who had given them the information, accompanied them for the first two or three miles, assisting in carrying their supplies. Then giving them

directions for reaching the ravine, he returned; first having exhausted his eloquence to dissuade them from so presumptuous an undertaking. Parting from their guide, their way lay over trackless mountains. Clambering over rocks and fallen trees, scratched by underbrush, foot-sore from constant bruises received from the flinty pavement on which they trod, they pursued their wearisome way. Anon they would emerge upon an unwooded tract, where, some years before, fire had left but a desert of bare rocks, and black, scorched trunks of trees; where a vertical sun poured down his blistering rays on the weary travelers. It was indeed a relief to plunge into the timbered solitudes; even though greedy flies pounced upon them, to suck their blood when the sun no longer drew from them a torrent of perspiration.

Finally they reached a narrow defile, bounded on each side by a precipice. From this defile flowed a stream of water, beside which there was barely room to enter. This they knew from the description given by the old mountaineer, was the ravine they were seeking. Climbing from boulder to boulder, wet with the spray of the brawling stream, they make their way into the defile. As they proceed it widens, and soon they find themselves in a considerable valley, bounded on all sides by impassable walls of rock. And what an overpowering solitude! A thick growth of timber, pine, hemlock, and hardwood, so completely shuts out the light of the sun, that a semi-twilight prevails. Only here and there a few sickly rays find their way through chinks in the foliage; falling upon the rough carpet like the last faint smile of a dying sun, that was about to depart forever. Surely this must be the vale of Hades. Look which way they would, they were shut in by a precipice. Did the demon of the place wish to capture them, he had only to station one or two of his goblins to guard the outlet, and he had them. The *debris* of boulders strewn around, gave the surface the appearance of having been agitated by the subterranean action of a burning volcano underneath. No wonder that any one the least tainted with superstition should hesitate to enter this miniature Pandemonium. But for the constant brawling of the stream of water, the solitude would have been unendurable. For a time both Horace

and Mr. Graphic seemed to be struck dumb by some unseen influence of this newly-found Tartarus. Mr. Graphic was the first to overcome the spell, remarking:

"Ah! Horace! verily we have entered the infernal regions. I felt, when we were passing through the defile, climbing, slipping, and sometimes wading through the stream, that we were really crossing the river Styx, and I thought of calling the ferryman Charon to our aid."

"Indeed," said Horace, "if we don't meet that Stygian boatman or some of his crew here, we need not seek them elsewhere, but may be content till they come for us of their own accord."

"Hark! what's that?" said Mr. Graphic.

"Nothing but the echo of our voices," said Horace. "Come, come, Mr. Graphic, you must not begin to be nervous so soon. Our researches have not commenced yet."

"Don't fear for me," said Mr. Graphic, as if ashamed of the surprise he had manifested. "If there is nothing more dangerous than ghosts here, I think we shall be able to manage them. The most I fear are panthers and catamounts; but with our well charged revolvers, and our trusty dog, I think we shall be able to manage them also."

"Hist! Did you see that?" This time the alarm came from Horace, and the dog growled. Mr. Graphic rallied Horace, but the latter exclaimed:

"The Lord preserve me, if I did not see a shadow dodge behind yonder rock!"

"Quite likely," said the other. "A gust of wind has parted the foliage of these dismal trees, and let in a little sunlight, which departing, caused a shadow."

"Such shadows," said Horace, "would not be likely to take human shape. Let us reconnoiter that rock, you taking the right and I the left flank."

"Nonsense! we are too tired just now to go chasing phantoms. Let us prepare our dinner. I believe there are trout in this stream. We will cut a couple of fishing rods, and throw the lines that we brought with us. What do you say to adding some of the speckled fish to our commissariat?"

"Good; we will throw our lines into this outlet of the lake of Tartarus, or the river Styx, whatever you please

to call it; and we will have it understood that nothing shall divert us from our purpose until we shall have gotten our dinner—not even a ghost throwing his line from the opposite side of the stream, or Charon floating down the current in his ghastly boat!”

The two friends were soon trolling their hooks and lines over the swift water. And they were not mistaken in the surmise that the stream contained trout. The deep seclusion, and water kept constantly cold by the impenetrable shade, evidently rendered the stream the paradise of the delightful speckled fish. They took hold of the hooks with the readiness of unsophisticated gudgeons, which had not often been tempted to their destruction by the delusive bait. It was quite plain that the ghostly inhabitants of this dismal valley did not much indulge in the sport of fishing. The two anglers, charmed with the successful sport, continued it much longer than was necessary to supply their immediate wants, and ere they ceased, a couple dozen splendid trout were flopping about among the rocks where they were landed, their bright spots giving forth gleams of light, like sparks of sunshine in the gloom.

It was now past mid-day, and with appetites sharpened by their rough tramp, the successful anglers made haste to clean their fish, and prepare a fire to cook them. With a supply of butter, salt, bread and other necessities, they soon sat down to a meal that the pampered guests of the best hotels in the country might have coveted. The honest and faithful dog, Tiger, was not neglected. Morsels as choice as any were constantly thrown to him. He lay off at a respectful distance, and as he, with great satisfaction, discussed the good fare with his masters, he apparently never forgot that they had embarked in an enterprise requiring constant vigilance. Anon the intelligent brute would elevate his ears, knit his brows, his countenance wearing the appearance of firm determination, but not malice, as he glanced around into the gloomy forest.

The repast finished, the next thing was to prepare a secure lodging place, as a base of operations, whence ulterior movements could be made. An overhanging rock was found, under which they could stand nearly erect. It

formed a sort of cranny, not only covered overhead, but inclosed on three sides by rock. It was a work of no very great labor to gather some heavy stones, and inclose the third side, leaving a door barely large enough to crawl in. With a hatchet which they had brought with them, they cut some stout pieces of wood, by which they could secure the sally port of their fortress on the inside. Gathering some hemlock boughs, they made a very comfortable bed, spreading the blankets upon the pliant evergreens. They thus prepared a scone, not much larger than was needful for them to lie down in, but a pretty good defense against panthers and catamounts, if not against nocturnal goblins.

Depositing their supplies within their Lilliputian castle, they made a brief survey of the valley. It was not extensive, there being not more than twenty or thirty acres within its precipitous walls; and at no place did they discover a break which would afford ingress or egress, except the point at which they entered. But they had not time to make a complete survey, for the sun was sinking behind the lofty peaks, and darkness set in before sunset. They returned to their fortress, and got up a lunch from the remains of their dinner. They then prepared a torch from materials which they had brought with them, to be used in case of an emergency, and, with the dog, retired within the portals of their castle, secured the door, and stretched themselves out on their rude couch for a night's rest. The dog lay at their feet, near the door, and they felt secure in the thought that the watchful animal would give the alarm in case of the approach of danger. As they lay at ease in their cozy retreat, they conversed in a low tone on the subject of their visit to this secluded vale.

"Do you know," said Mr. Graphic, "what I have thought about the strange, and apparently supernatural, manifestations that are prevalent in these mountains? I have frequently surmised that the Leech Club have something to do with them. I have thought that the apparitions are somehow gotten up to order by them, to keep intruders from frequenting this part of the country. My only fear in this investigation of ours is that we may find ourselves dealing with something more sub-

stantial than ghosts. What if it should turn out that that conclave of public thieves keep a den of outlaws in this very glen, to do their bidding, and to take care of such persons as may be dangerous to their plans of public plunder? They may have a secret cavern here in the mountains, as well for a retreat for themselves, as for a cover under which to dispose of such as may incur their vengeance, either by the knife of the cut-throat or by a forced imprisonment in a cavern-cell. Should we meet with a gang of such gentry, we would hardly find ourselves numerous enough for the occasion."

"I have thought the same thing," said Horace, "but the evidence that the members of the Leech Club have an undoubted dread of these apparitions has convinced me that they are as much puzzled by them as we are. Still, I think they are rather glad of the presence of these mysterious appearances, as they have the effect of keeping away intruders, and the Club feel secure in their castle against any marauders. If the Club really have a gang of outlaws here in the mountains to perform dark deeds, I feel certain there are also another class of mysterious beings here, which have no connection with the Club; and the latter are as ignorant of their origin, nature and purposes as we are."

"You have," said Mr. Graphic, "heard the story of the discovery of gold in these mountains by the Dutch while they held the country; how the Dutch Governor Kieft sent an agent to Holland with a quantity of the ore, and the ship on which he sailed was lost, and all on board perished. Kieft himself, being succeeded in office by Stuyvesant, sailed for Holland with a quantity of the ore; but his ship was also lost, and with him was buried the knowledge of the whereabouts of the precious ore. From that day to this no one has been able again to discover it. Perhaps the mysterious beings lately appearing in these mountains have discovered the valuable secret, and wish to keep all others away."

Mr. Graphic did not say this because he thought it probable, but only gave it as one more theory; as men will do when investigating anything concerning which they are completely nonplused. So they continued to suggest theory after theory, none of which were in the

least satisfactory to themselves, until their conversation died away into the slumbering sounds of the cricket and beetle, and they fell asleep; perchance to solve the mystery in dreams.

Nothing occurred to mar their slumbers till about midnight; when a medley of terror burst upon them, such as has seldom saluted the ears of mortals. Their courageous dog, with a howl, as if stricken with an overpowering fear, crawled up beside his masters. They were awakened by a medley of terrific sounds immediately around their habitation, which it was impossible to classify. It appeared to be a combination of the yell of the demon, the cry of the panther, the warwhoop of the Indian, and the wail of the damned. The awful sounds came from the forest, from the rock overhanging their habitation, and through every crevice of its walls; as if the fiends placed their mouths close up to the chinks to salute the horrified ears of the two devoted men with their demoniac yells. It verily appeared as if the two individuals were beset by a legion of goblins. Grasping their pistols, they crept up to the door, and endeavored to peer out through the chinks. All was as black as Tartarus. Not an object could be seen. For a moment they hesitated to light their torch, but soon concluded that, if they were beset by any real danger, their assailants would not long hesitate to make a more substantial attack on their fortress, and they would be better prepared to defend themselves in light than in darkness. The torch was accordingly lighted, and while Mr. Graphic opened a small port-hole, and thrust the light out into the thick darkness, Horace, pistol in hand, watched at another chink, ready to fire on anything that might be seen. The torch illuminated the gloomy trees and rocks, causing them to cast weird shadows, but not a semblance of a living being was to be seen. Still the noises continued, but from so many directions it was impossible to detect any particular spot as the lurking place of a member of the horrid crew. Sometimes the fearful sounds would die away entirely, and then start up again with tenfold terror. After watching for some time with torch protruding from the grotto, Horace saw a shadowy form flit athwart the beam of light, and instantly discharged his pistol at it. Though within point-blank

range, and only a few feet off, the bullet had no effect on the apparition, and it glided away into the darkness. Then there followed another, and another, and another of the weird figures across the range of his revolver, at each one of which he discharged the weapon, until he emptied one pistol with as little effect as if he had fired at the empty air.

Whether owing to the discharge of the pistol, or whether the ghostly choir had become wearied with their infernal chorus, the unharmonious serenade soon ceased after the firing, having continued about half an hour. It would be impossible to describe the feelings of the two men as they once more breathed freely, and had time to collect their excited thoughts. Their grotto was a place of remarkable security, being protected overhead and on three sides by immovable rocks, and the third side, which was of small dimensions, was built up with heavy stones. They felt sure, with their four revolvers, they could defend themselves against twenty or thirty human assailants. Neither of them was superstitious, but what could they think when their bullets made no impression on these shadowy marauders? Men may be ever so stubborn in any belief, but when constant ocular demonstration is presented to them, apparently disproving their firm convictions, they begin to waver, and think they may be mistaken after all. The demonstration which appears to refute their previously strongly rooted belief, may be a delusion, still the repetition of it will shake their faith unless they can get to the bottom of it, and discover the fallacy. So the most absurdisms of the day find followers, if they can only keep up a specious system of deceptions until a considerable number of people grow into the belief that the plausible fallacies are real truths.

Hard knocks and blows will convince men of many things, when they have no means of meeting their adversaries with similar arguments; and the fearful blows just laid on the moral constitutions of Horace and his companion by the unearthly things which they had just witnessed, were working toward a change in their opinions respecting supernatural agencies.

They had drawn in their torch, fastened up the port-

holes, reloaded the discharged pistol, and taken means to make their grotto more secure than ever, and sat back in an easy position, apparently exhausted by the great strain their minds had undergone. The dog sat looking at them in a cowed, apologetic manner, as if to say: "You must excuse me, gentlemen, for the non-combative part I have acted in this matter. Show me a panther, a bear, a wolf, a catamount, or even a human enemy, and if old Tiger don't show himself foremost in the charge, then tie a stone to his neck, and throw him into yonder stream. But really, gentlemen, this is not in my line. I can't set these fangs into things impalpable. I can't throttle the wind, nor crush the heart and bowels of shadows without substance."

"This is fearful and wonderful," said Mr. Graphic, finally breaking the silence.

"Truly," said Horace, "those were no earthly sounds that we heard, nor earthly forms that I shot at; though I never admitted as much, even to myself, before."

"You are right; only the fiends of Hades could get up such an infernal discord. I verily believe that Pandemonium was emptied of its goblin legions, that they might give us an idea of hell's concerts."

"It, indeed, appeared as though a volcano had broken forth in this dread valley, which, instead of molten lava, sent forth an eruption of malignant spirits from the forgotten graves of many ages; and that Beelzebub, appearing in the midst, had organized an impromptu opera, set to the music of the Plutonian realms."

"Or, perchance, mischievous spirits have been playing on us a tremendous practical joke. You see they have left us unharmed, except the frightening we may have suffered." Mr. Graphic said this with a sort of venture at jesting, as if recovering from the freezing depression that the terrific exhibition had caused.

"And after all," said Horace, "this may be but the legerdemain of a few jugglers in pay of the Leech Club"—so slow are men to admit the truth of things they have made up their minds not to believe.

"Such a thing is possible," said Mr. Graphic. "Three or four persons gifted with the power of ventriloquism, might have created the hideous discord, and with the ma-

chinery of jugglers, might have caused the shadows which you shot at to flit before the beam of light radiating from our torch; but I find it as hard to believe that so much trouble could be taken to provide for such an exhibition in this out-of-the-way place, for the idle purpose of frightening two humble individuals like ourselves, as I do to believe that the affair was supernatural. I fear that this must ever remain one of those unexplained mysteries which have puzzled wise men from time immemorial. There certainly are many well authenticated cases in which the spirits of the dead have apparently revisited the earth and conferred with mortals. I do not mean to say that I positively believe this to be the case, but I do know that there are cases which can be explained in no other way."

"I shall," said Horace, "leave no stone unturned to fathom this mystery."

"And I," said Mr. Graphic, "believe that it is a duty we owe to mankind to get to the bottom of it. As men sacrifice themselves for a principle, or on the altar of science, I believe we are justified in periling even our lives to solve the problem here presented to us. Let us now to rest, to prepare ourselves for the beginning of a campaign to-morrow—it may be against evil-disposed men; it may be against fiends and goblins; but now that we are here, let us fight it out like valiant soldiers battling to know the truth."

With this they retired again to slumber. They were not again disturbed, but slept till the sun had shed as much light within the dreary valley as the matted foliage of the giant trees would permit.

When they issued forth upon the scene of the previous night's hideousness, revolver in hand, they looked carefully for any tracks of their disturbers. Not a sign of anything of the kind could be seen. The ground, littered with the usual fallen foliage of evergreens, bore no footprints of man or beast. It is true that living beings might have taken the pains to tread from rock to rock, and thus made no tracks; but this would have been a difficult operation in the night.

The sombre valley, though gloomy in the extreme, nevertheless possessed features of wild grandeur, which called

forth the admiration of the artistic Mr. Graphic, and the naturally poetical Horace. The rugged, rocky precipices encircling it, the lofty and venerable trees, the turbulent stream thundering down in one almost continuous cascade through the center, rendered the solitary vale unique and enchanting beyond description. The two sojourners again threw their lines into the stream to catch the blithesome trout for their morning meal. Soon a number of the finny beauties were lifted from the foaming element, and were capering on the ground as if dancing the wild dance of the valley, to the music of the roaring waters. No one could grumble at the breakfast made at a fire kindled in the open air, with trout and articles from their haversacks, and water from the mountain stream. Tiger was encouraged to take his share, though he appeared half ashamed to come forward, as if he did not approve of his own conduct on the previous night.

Leaving their "traps" in their hut, with the door secured, and each armed with his two revolvers, they set out for a thorough exploration of the valley. Making a circuit around it, they found that the stream of water came down from the top of the cliff in a beautiful cascade at the head of the vale, and that it was increased by powerful springs within the valley. They learned to a certainty that there was no outlet to the glen except the one by which they entered. Having thus carefully examined the encircling precipices, they commenced searching every nook and cranny and rock in the vale. The dog had regained his courage and joined in the hunt.

They had continued this search several hours, without discovering aught of interest, when Horace felt certain he saw something dodge behind a distant rock. Without uttering the least note of alarm, he quietly communicated his suspicions to Mr. Graphic. The two agreed to move in different directions, and head off the skulker on two sides. The dog was well trained, and was kept close to Mr. Graphic. Stealthily they crept through the thick trees upon their intended prey. Finally they flank the rock, each at opposite sides, and behold, there stands a strange looking individual! On seeing the two intruders, he starts as if to retreat, but the two, with cocked pistols, spring forward and head him off. Thus he is

hemmed in by the rock on one side, and two men armed to the teeth on the other. The assailants would not have been the least surprised had he vanished into nothing, but he did not. He halted; and in mutual silence assailants and assailed gazed on each other for about a minute. Finally Horace exclaimed:

"If my eyes don't deceive me, you are the wight that disturbed the party with ghostly masquerading, not long since. Now my good goblin, we will serve you as a certain man did an ass which dressed in a lion's skin to scare foolish people. We will strip off your masquerading garb, and show you to people in your true character."

The stranger said not a word, but Mr. Graphic detected a scornful smile play about his mouth.

"Come," said Horace, "take off that masquerading attire, and let us see what sort of a monster you are."

"More gently, Horace," said Mr. Graphic, "let us parley with him. I say, stranger, tell us who and what you are, whence you come, and whether you have aught to do with the seemingly infernal powers which haunt these mountains, and more especially this valley."

The stranger at first deigned no reply, and the expression of his countenance was that of ineffable scorn, as much as to say: "And who are you that expect me to answer all the vain questions that you see fit to propound?" Mr. Graphic observed this lofty bearing of the stranger, and his apparent indifference to the weapons leveled at him, and adopted a more conciliatory tone, as he said:

"My good sir, deign to tell us if you know aught of these mysteries. We have come here prompted by no idle curiosity. Our souls have been so greatly vexed by matters which we know not whether to class with the supernal or corporeal, that we could no longer contain ourselves without making an effort to unravel the dark problem. Then graciously say whether it is in your power to enlighten us. Whether mortal or spirit, if you have kindly feelings, let not our yearning souls starve and droop with ignorance! Give us such knowledge as you have, and whether it is what we seek or not, we shall be thankful."

"Do men asking favors," said the stranger, "do so

with weapons threatening those from whom they ask? You act rather like the highwayman, seeking what you demand at the muzzle of deadly fire-arms."

"True," said Mr. Graphic, "we have been sorely tried here, and looked upon any one we might meet as a probable enemy. This should serve as some palliation of our rudeness."

Here Mr. Graphic lowered his weapon, and Horace did likewise. As if recognizing their disposition to be civil, the stranger said:

"The few who know aught of me, call me the 'Hermit of the Catskills.' The remnant of my people removed from these hills far toward the setting sun, before my birth. I have come here to remain for a time to commune with the spirits of my ancestors. Who has a better right here than I?"

"Then," said Mr. Graphic, "you claim descent from the red men who inhabited these hills many scores of years ago."

"Yes."

"Tell us, pray, if you know anything of the wonderful and terrible manifestations that we have witnessed in this valley. Do you know whence came the awful sounds that last night saluted our ears, and the strange apparitions that flitted before our vision?"

"How shall I know," said the stranger, "what sounds men hear or what sights they see? All nature is full of sounds, apparitions, and mysteries. These mountains may be just now a favorite haunt of visitors from the spirit land. But there is nothing here but may be witnessed everywhere on a smaller scale. Think you the spirits of hundreds of generations never come back to their old haunts, or congregate in some favorite spot, to hold communion? I, as well as you, hear sounds; but I find them not terrible nor discordant. If you have heard the communications of another world, and been terrified thereby, it is because your earthly natures have not been able to comprehend the ways of those who have been released from the clogs of earth. Some mortals are so far favored, even on this sphere, as to be able to rise, in a measure, up to the standard of the eternal world."

"The whisperings from the myriads of spirits are

borne on every night breeze. The spirits speak through the branches of the tall pine; they murmur in the gurgling stream; they softly smile through the dainty wild flowers; they thunder in the tempest and hurricane; their shadowy forms may be seen in the clouds; they may be seen flitting on the waving grass; they glide in fairy boats down the frothy current and the snowy cascade; they flit among the trees like nightly mists. There is scarcely anything in nature in which we may not hear their voices, if we only have ears for them, there is scarcely any spot where we may not see the dim outlines of their forms, if our eyes have been so far divested of their earthly film as to be able to discern the infinite from the finite.

“With myriads of the inhabitants of the unknown, intermingling with the known world, how shall I know what you have seen and heard? I myself see and hear many things that I do not fully comprehend, because I am not completely freed from my allegiance to earth. Until then, I cannot enjoy the full and grand communion with those who have been disembodied from this groveling, and soul-confining world. I must yet divide my attention between the two worlds. You ask me to enlighten you on the mysterious subject which has so greatly vexed your souls. Can I turn this hard rock into a pine tree? Can I bid the pine tree speak, and walk, and reason, and hold fellowship with you two men, as if it had been created like you? As well may I try to call forth in you understanding which is not in you; tell you to leap from the finite into the infinite, while the clog of earth is chained to your souls like the weight of one of these mountains, keeping them down. If your minds ever so far grow loose from this clay that you can comprehend things a little apart from this mundane sphere, which happens to some favored mortals, then you will know something of these things which have so greatly exercised you; and that which you have denominated horrid discord, will, perhaps, appear to you as the music of celestial powers. Unless you in this world reach this beatitude of knowledge, you will have to wait for your enlightenment till your spirits are disenthralled from the clay which clogs the immortal mind.”

"Strange man," said Horace, "you speak in dark enigmas. It is remarkable that one of your seeming education and intelligence should be given over to such hallucinations, and that you should banish yourself from the rest of mankind, and persuade yourself that you find sweeter communion with spirits that are not of this world, than with your own fellow mortals. Think of the good you might do your own savage race, by instructing them; for, by some means, you have evidently been favored with a liberal education. But let us get better acquainted. Show us your habitation, and also visit our abode here in the valley."

"You have," said the stranger, "asked something impossible. I cannot show you my habitation, for it is like that of those with whom I here commune—not confined to any pent-up abode. Neither can I visit yours. My way lies elsewhere to answer a summons that I would not disobey."

"But, my good friend," said Horace, "you must come with us for a few hours. We will treat you well, and regale you with a dinner worthy of a Satyr of this dark glen. We insist that you shall accept our hospitalities for a short time."

"I cannot go," was the firm reply.

"Oh!" said Horace good naturedly, "we will compel you to go and share our dinner, at least. We will each take you by the arm and make you temporarily our prisoner, long enough to enjoy the pleasure of your company at dinner. We insist on doing this to make up for the rudeness with which we at first assailed you."

Horace and Mr. Graphic made a movement as if to enforce this hospitality; and doubtless they intended to do so, for they were determined either by force or persuasion to learn something more of the Hermit of the Catskills. The stranger at first manifested no uneasiness at their movement; and this threw them off their guard, when he darted like a flash between them, and before they had fairly recovered from their astonishment he had dived into a thick clump of bushes at the foot of the precipice which hemmed in the valley. They pursued, thinking he could not escape them, but when they had reached the spot where the stranger disappeared in the

bushes, nothing was to be seen. There was no apparent opening in the precipice, except holes among the *debris* of boulders; but none of these seemed to present a means of escape. They did not search long, for soon the stranger showed himself at the top of the precipice—as he had done to Horace on the night of the party—and immediately disappeared. After vainly endeavoring to discover the means by which the stranger had scaled the perpendicular wall, Horace and Mr. Graphic returned to their hut.

Taking their lines, they again caught a few trout, and prepared a good dinner. As they ate they discussed the unfathomable mystery that surrounded them.

“What fools we were,” said Horace, “that we did not at once seize that strange object and make him our prisoner.”

“I doubt if we could have done it,” said Mr. Graphic. “Did you not see how scornfully he curled his lip when you demanded his surrender? I think he all the time felt confident of his ability to elude us.”

“He is undoubtedly the same mysterious individual that interrupted the party at the castle, and with whom I had such a bootless race at the risk of life and limb. Instead of advancing a step toward unraveling these mysteries, they thicken around us. The thought almost maddens me. If the ghostly choir commence one of their rehearsals about our grotto to-night, I shall march out amongst them, though I shall be confronted by the stalking goblins of a whole grave-yard, and seize by the throat the first one I find within my reach.”

“But your experience thus far has been that they keep just within tantalizing distance of you, without giving you the opportunity of demonstrating whether there is anything sufficiently substantial about them to admit of their receiving such punishment for their impertinence as a good sound castigation, or a temporary suspension of their respiration by being throttled.”

After dinner Mr. Graphic took his pencil, and proceeded to sketch some of the grand features of the valley, while Horace wrote out an account of their adventures, and his thoughts on the subject. At night they retired to their secure lodge, with the dog inside as be-

fore, trusting to the animal to alarm them in case anything approached. They were not disturbed, and so Horace had no opportunity to charge upon a battalion of phantoms. They had concluded to spend one more day in the valley. After drawing upon the unfailing trout-stream, they partook of a warm breakfast, preparatory to another day's investigations.

This time they had not proceeded far till they started a new species of game. The dog seemed greatly delighted that he had finally found something worthy of his mettle. He was soon in full tilt, baying after a fox.

"Ah!" said Horace, "the goblins, having exhausted their ingenuity in trying to frighten us away by appearing in human shape, have now sent one of their number to see what he can do in the form of that cunning animal, the fox."

"Well," said Mr. Graphic, "I should not be surprised if they had adopted this shrewd plan of sending a fox to draw us off, and divert us from the real purpose of our investigation. So we can safely leave the four-legged goblin to old Tiger, while we pursue the nobler game of bipedal ghosts."

"I judge from the barking," said Horace, "that Tiger has holed the vulpine goblin. Let us at least go and see what sort of a den the dragon has. I have heard of capturing a witch by fastening upon the animal which she had entered. It would truly be a little revenge to get one of these goblins in limbo by caging a fox."

They proceeded to the spot where Tiger was barking, and found him at a hole which seemed to penetrate the encircling precipice. There were some boulders about the hole, apparently loose, which a good lever might remove. With the hatchet, which one of them constantly carried in his belt, they cut a stout sapling. With this they soon pried out two or three of the boulders, enlarging the hole sufficiently for the dog or a man to enter bodily. They had no sooner effected this opening than Tiger made his way into the hole. He disappeared entirely from sight and hearing. He had evidently found a subterranean passage of considerable extent. They called and whistled to the dog, but he had plainly gone beyond hearing, for he was so thoroughly trained that he never

failed to respond to a call. Had he fallen down some frightful chasm and been dashed to pieces? But soon this anxiety was relieved, for a scampering was heard, and Tiger came rushing out of the hole in evident terror.

It was no fox, nor even wolf or panther that could frighten Tiger in that manner. The two men immediately came to the conclusion that he had seen some of those strange things which had terrified him before. Here, then, was a new field of investigation. Should they enter that dark, subterranean passage? What unknown dangers might they encounter there? Yawning chasms? Savage beasts? Robbers? They had already passed through adventures that would have sorely tried the nerves of most men. But all this was nothing to the contemplation of the dangers which might lurk in the dark, unexplored cavern in the bowels of the mountain. But danger was nothing to the torture of doubt which had taken possession of their minds. They knew not whether the strange things they had encountered were the results of supernatural agencies or the juggleries of designing men. To solve this problem and relieve their minds of the terrible doubt, they had fully resolved to venture everything. Had a lake, appearing to be the yawning gulf of hell, opened before them, they would have constructed a raft to ferry it over. Nor would it be just to call them fool-hardy. Men have often periled their lives for a principle, or in the cause of science, and have been highly applauded. Here was a soul-vexing problem to be solved, and those who ventured so much to clear it up, exhibited the true spirit of heroism.

Horace remained at the mouth of the subterranean passage, while Mr. Graphic returned to their hut for the materials to make a couple of torches. He soon returned, bringing also a day's provisions, a rope and their whole supply of pistol cartridges. Having prepared their torches, they had two small cans of oil left for replenishing them, each carrying one in his pocket. Thus, well provided for contingencies, each having a long wooden staff, they entered the low subterranean passage, the dog following in the rear. At first they were obliged to crawl on their hands and knees. The passage gradually

expanded, and at a distance of about twenty feet from the entrance, they were able to walk erect. Their torches threw a sepulchral beam of light but a short distance ahead, being unable to penetrate the thick darkness more than a few feet. Carefully they walked, surveying every step, for a chasm might at any time open to engulf them. At short intervals they set up little piles of pebbles, to serve for a guide to lead them back to the entrance. They soon found themselves in a cavern wide and high, with many chambers and ramifications. Everything was so still that their footsteps awakened the echoes, and they could almost hear the beatings of their own hearts. Occasionally a vein of water would be found issuing from the side wall, and sinking away into the seams of the rock. The chambers were generally, however, remarkably dry.

Presently something like a flash of lightning lit up the cavern all around them, and this was followed by a rumbling noise like thunder, reverberating through the innermost recesses of the cave, finally dying away, and leaving no sound but that of their quick beating hearts, and no light but that of the two torches. They came to a halt, and the dog cowered close to them. Again they advanced for a considerable distance, when there was another flash, this time a perfect blaze, lasting for some time like continuous sheet lightning. As their eyes recovered from the glare, they discerned a short distance ahead a narrow passage in the cavern, and just as the flash died away, they thought they saw human figures in this passage. A rumbling sound like thunder followed the flash, and this had no more than ceased, when there was another blaze. Their eyes were now directed to the narrow passage, and now they saw the unmistakable outlines of human forms, with staves in their hands, apparently standing guard there to bar the progress of the two explorers. The flash died away, again followed by rolling thunder. The passage guarded by the weird figures was involved in darkness, for the light of the torches would not penetrate the thick gloom far enough to reveal the passage.

Here was a situation to try the nerves of men who would not hesitate to march up to the cannon's mouth.

They knew not what they were advancing against. They might be a gang of desperate men; they might be goblins from the bottomless pit, who could call to their aid the deadly lightnings from the molten bowels of the earth. But the two explorers came not here to retreat. They pause but a moment to brace up their nerves and adjust their weapons. Then shoulder to shoulder they give out to each other the encouraging and stirring word:

“Forward!”

Few instances can be cited of more heroic attitudes than that of the two explorers as they moved on into unknown dangers. They proceed but a short distance, when the sickly light of their torches reveal the spectral figures guarding the narrow passage, but a few feet off. They stop to parley.

“Who, and what are you,” said Horace, “that inhabit this gloomy cavern, and why do you stand there as if to block the way? We come not to harm you, but would know who you are!”

At this instant another flash of sheet lightning illuminated the gloom around, giving the scene an awful and weird appearance. The usual accompanying roll of thunder followed, and then all was still. But the figures, four or five in number, still maintained their position in the narrow passage, and Horace continued:

“Unless you speak, and say you are peaceably disposed, we shall consider you as enemies and outlaws, and fire on you.”

“Audacious men!” said a voice from the passage, “advance but a few more yards and you will meet your death. Back whence you came, while it is yet in your power to do so. Back, I charge you, as you value your lives! Before you is death in a hundred shapes!”

“We are not to be intimidated,” said Horace, “by any of your vain jugglery. Tell us this instant whether you are hostilely or peacefully disposed, or we will fire on you, and your blood be upon your own heads.”

A loud sepulchral laugh, echoing through the cavern, was the only reply.

“Speak,” said Horace, “or we fire.”

This was answered by another laugh, the echoes of which were drowned by the reports of the pistols in the

hands of Horace and Mr. Graphic. They each took deliberate aim, and fired two or three barrels of their revolvers. The echoes multiplied the sounds as if several platoons of musketry had been fired off in succession. They paused for the smoke to clear away, that they might observe the effect. The spectres had not changed their position. The two explorers resolved to waste no more ammunition on the goblins, but press them to close quarters, and see what effect a blow from a staff would have on them.

Again they encouraged each other by shouting, "Forward." They advanced with staves uplifted, cautiously, so as not to step into pitfalls. As they reached the narrow defile, the figures appeared to glide away into nothing, and seemed to dissolve in darkness. Proceeding a short distance, the two explorers came to a deep chasm, on each side of which, close to the wall of the cavern, was just room enough for a single footman. Here they separated, each taking one of the paths which led around the chasm. At intervals they saw the spectral figures in front of them, and as often as they saw them, they discharged their pistols at the flitting goblins. The report of the pistols and the re-answering echoes, and the constant shouting out of words of encouragement to each other, raised a ceaseless din in the cavern, as great as that created in the open air by several regiments of soldiers going through the manual of arms. The dog, too, had caught the heroic spirit of his masters, and added his constant barking to the general discord. The chasm had widened so that they could but just discern each other across its murky depths. Sometimes pillars of rock, probably supports of the cavern roof, arose from the gulf, entirely obstructing their view of each other.

The path on which Horace walked, had for some time been narrowing, until it had become but a mere foothold, and his position was perilous in the extreme. Finally it dwindled down to nothing, and the wall of the cavern was also the boundary of the chasm. On examination he saw that a little farther on the path commenced again. But it was impossible for him to reach this footing, unless he could, like a fly, crawl for some distance along a perpendicular wall of rock. The chasm had grown so

wide that his companion on the other side was no longer within speaking distance. It would be impossible for Horace to describe his situation to Mr. Graphic, and if he retraced his steps, his companion would not know of the movement, but would keep on his way, and they would be separated. But there was no alternative. Back he must go. And even this was not so easy. He had for some time been creeping carefully along on a mere shelf of rock, scarcely as wide as his foot, with a high wall of rock on one side, and an abyss of unknown depth on the other. The least mis-step would land him into the murky gulf.

He stood for a moment to rest, and brace his nerves for the trying task. In turning around, he dropped his torch. It caught on the narrow shelf. It is just on the balance, and is about to topple over into the chasm. Horace becomes agitated at the thought of being left in that terrible situation in darkness. He makes a spasmodic movement to clutch his torch. He has it—Good heavens! he slips, and both he and torch pitch over into the black gulf!

Mr. Graphic met with no obstruction in his journey around the abyss. He had for some time ceased to call out to Horace, as they were not within hearing distance, and he could only just see the dim light of his torch like an *ignis fatuus*, across the gulf. He finally noticed that the torch of Horace could not be seen, but thought that some turn in the path might have obscured it from view. Soon after Horace met with the terrible catastrophe, Mr. Graphic came to the end of the chasm. He immediately crossed over to the other side of the cavern, where he expected to meet Horace. What was his surprise on reaching that side to find neither his friend nor any signs of the light of his torch. There was a path between the chasm and the cavern wall, the same as where they separated, and Mr. Graphic proceeded up this path, hoping to meet Horace. Soon he came to a point where the path narrowed down to nothing, and only the perpendicular wall bounded the abyss. The terrible truth flashed upon him. Horace must have fallen into the gulf. Then Mr. Graphic began to realize the horror of his own situation. It will be recollected that, at first, the two explorers

had at short intervals heaped up small piles of pebbles to guide them back to the entrance of the cavern, but this precaution had been neglected in their encounter with the strange apparitions, and the chances were that Mr. Graphic would never be able to find his way out through the labyrinth of chambers. He retraced his steps for a short distance, and sat down with a feeling of utter despair. He thought of the spectral voice which had told them that to advance that way was to go to certain death. Here he was alone in that awful, dark solitude, buried alive beneath a mountain, with a short supply of provisions, and oil to replenish his torch but once more. His situation was like that of the men spoken of in the Eastern tale, who are buried in the vault with their dead wives, with only a loaf of bread and a jug of water, after consuming which, they are doomed to die of starvation.

Presently the thought occurred to Mr. Graphic that Horace might still be alive. He went back again as near as he could get to the point where Horace's journey must have terminated. He shouted the name of his friend, but his only answer was the sepulchral echoes. Then he fired his pistol and listened. Immediately he heard a sharp report down in the gulf, which could not be an echo. He fired again, and received a like response from the depths of the chasm. He waited a short time, thinking that if he could hear a report from the gulf after the echoes had died away, that would clinch the matter that his friend was down there. He was not disappointed. Soon he heard the crack of a pistol down in the chasm, and this time it was nearer. Horace was evidently alive, and was drawing near to the point where Mr. Graphic stood. After waiting a short time, Mr. Graphic again fired his pistol to guide the wanderer in the darkness. The next time he heard the report of a pistol from the chasm immediately opposite the point where he stood. Horace had evidently got in a position to see the torch of Mr. Graphic, and was working his way toward the spot. Mr. Graphic waited about half an hour, occasionally exchanging pistol signals, when finally the report seemed to come from a point almost beneath his feet. Horace had reached the perpendicular wall of the chasm, and could come no further. The two friends were

now in shouting distance of each other, and Mr. Graphic distinctly heard the words:

“Let down the rope!”

“Ah! yes,” said Mr. Graphic joyfully to himself, “I had forgotten that I carry a rope tied around my body.”

Unwinding it, he fastened one end to a craggy rock, so as to make sure it would not escape from his hands, and then he let the other end down into the gloom. Horace could see the point where the rope was let down by means of the light from Mr. Graphic's torch. The rope was a small, stout cord, forty feet long, but it dangled ten feet above the head of Horace. By no means could he elongate his person so as to reach ten feet more than nature had designed him to. There were no loose boulders at hand by which he could raise up a mound to enable him to reach the tantalizing rope. Mr. Graphic thought of a remedy. He drew the rope up, and taking the coat from his back, commenced tearing it into strips, and twisting a rope therefrom. He also used such other portions of his clothing as he could best spare, until he had made the rope the desired length, when he again let it down. He had the inexpressible satisfaction of finding that his friend could reach it. Horace took hold of a loop on the end, and Mr. Graphic commenced the laborious task of hauling him up. Hand over hand, slowly he draws his friend from the gulf. As he gets his work about half done, Mr. Graphic becomes completely exhausted, and is obliged to give the rope a turn around a rock, and rest, while Horace is dangling like a malefactor in mid-air.

It was a terrible situation. Horace was hanging on with his hands, and was already so completely exhausted that his grip was about to give out, when he would have fallen about thirty feet upon the rocks. But human endurance can hardly be estimated when life depends on it. Mr. Graphic rested but a moment, and again braced himself to his trying task. With his utmost exertions he could proceed but slowly, and every moment seemed to be the last that Horace's strained muscles could hold out in maintaining his grip upon the rope. And the task of Mr. Graphic was not much less exhausting. He had to draw up the weight of his friend by main

strength, without any aid of leverage. The warnings from Horace that he was about ready to drop, caused Mr. Graphic to redouble his exertions, and still the progress he made was hardly more perceptible than the motion of the sun through the arc of the heavens. He had gotten Horace within ten feet of the top of the precipice, when overtaxed nature could do no more, and he was again compelled to give the rope a turn around a rock, and stop long enough to regain strength.

The situation of Horace was now awful. For some time past it seemed that every moment would be the last that he could hold on. He had at each moment discounted his strength for the next moment. Like a man pushed by merciless creditors, he had to pay large discounts for thus drawing on the chances of the future. He had so greatly discounted his strength ahead, that he was about to become bankrupt before reaching the desired goal. His banker of strength refuses to make any further advances! One arm drops by his side! The grip of the other must relax in a moment! The black, Tartarian gulf yawns to receive him again! this time with a Procrustean bed of sharp rocks prepared to impale him! Pray, banker of strength, give him one more small discount! Why withdraw credit from him when he has so nearly passed the crisis, and will be able to repay all with interest?

When Mr. Graphic's overtaxed nerves had refused to do longer their office, and he was compelled to rest, he observed to his horror that the portion of rope which he had made from his clothing, which had now just arisen within sight, was about to part. It would seem that he should have tied that part to the end of the rope which he retained in his hands, but men do not think of all contingencies in the excitement of danger. He stopped only long enough for his distended muscles to regain a little of their power, when, lying down upon his face and looking over the precipice, he saw that Horace was about to drop. He saw that, with the condition of the rope, it would be folly and certain death to attempt to draw him farther. All hope is gone! No, he sees just at one side, a little below where Horace hangs, is a flat rock jutting out beyond the wall of the chasm. If Ho-

race were only hanging over this he might drop on this shelf, and rest till he had sufficient strength to be hoisted up. Mr. Graphic concentrated all his strength, and gave the rope a swing. As it swayed to one side, the cloth rope parted, and Horace dropped on the shelf-rock, only a foot or two below him, in a fainting condition. Mr. Graphic was but little less exhausted than his friend, and he also lay for some minutes completely prostrated.

On recovering, it was the work of but a few moments for Mr. Graphic to double his remaining strong rope, fasten it to the rocks, and descend to the shelf where his friend lay. He found him still unconscious. Fastening the rope about Horace's body, Mr. Graphic ascended to the top of the precipice, and soon drew his friend completely out of the chasm. With water from a flask which he carried in his pocket, he bathed his temples, and it was not long before he revived so as to be able to speak.

It appeared that when Horace was first precipitated into the chasm, he fell perpendicularly only about ten or twelve feet, receiving no serious injury. He landed on a steep, shelving rock, down which he slid with great rapidity, to an unknown depth; but his fall was thus broken, and he was comparatively uninjured. He found it impossible to ascend the steep rock down which he slid; his torch was extinguished and lost in the fall; and being in darkness, he had no alternative but to wait until he heard a signal from Mr. Graphic. Hearing the report of the latter's pistol, he groped his way toward the spot whence the sound came. Creeping along on his hands and knees, feeling every foot of the way, he ascended a considerable elevation before reaching the foot of the precipice where Mr. Graphic stood. After a time, in this dreary progress, he got in sight of Mr. Graphic's torch. He then had an unmistakable cynosure to guide him in the direction that he wanted to go, but the bottom of the gulf was full of fissures, and very uneven, and it was only with the utmost caution that he avoided being dashed to pieces. He finally reached the foot of the wall where Mr. Graphic stood. The reader knows the rest.

Horace and Mr. Graphic having, in a measure, recov-

ered from their terrible exhaustion, retired to a distance from the abyss, and sat down to refresh themselves with a portion of the provisions which they had brought with them, washed down with water which they carried in their flasks. Their repast finished, their time-pieces told them it was now far into the night, and they looked about for some more favorable place to sleep than on the cold rocks. They selected a spot where there was a deposit of dry soil, and as it was warm in the cavern, they could sleep very well on this after their exhaustive labors. They now had but one torch left, and this they extinguished, as it behooved them to economize their oil. The dog lay beside them, and thus they went to sleep in the vast, gloomy cavern, which might perchance be destined to be their sepulcher.

After several hours repose, they awoke much refreshed. Striking a match, they lighted their torch, and breakfasted on nearly the last of their provisions, having but just enough left for another meal. Still, Tiger was not forgotten, sharing with his masters the remnant of their stores.

The prospect of getting out of this dreary prison was certainly not encouraging. They could return around the chasm by the path which Mr. Graphic came, but having done so, they knew not what course next to pursue. They had no guide to direct them to the small aperture through which they entered. But they must at least make the effort. They accordingly threaded the narrow path along the terrible gulf in which Horace had been so long imprisoned. They could not miss their way here. But when they got to the end of the chasm, they had to strike out at a venture. They soon found themselves in a high, spacious chamber, which they did not remember to have seen before. They kept on till it terminated in a dead wall. There was no outlet in that direction. They were evidently on the wrong track. They returned, and struck out in another direction, but soon found themselves in a similar *cul-de-sac*.

So they continued for hours, striking out in various directions at a hazard, like mariners without a chart or compass on an unknown sea. Finally, exhausted and bewildered, they sat down in utter despair. The dog lay

at their feet, apparently comprehending the situation, as he looked up into the faces of his masters by the dim light of the torch. They took but a few mouthfuls of their small store of provisions, determined to husband them to the last extremity. After they had sat for an hour or so, the dog became impatient, and set out in the darkness on his own account. In about half an hour he returned, presenting himself before his masters, as if much pleased with some discovery he had made. He evidently seemed to say in pantomime: "Follow me, and I will show you something that will do your hearts good."

A thought flashed upon the two benighted men that they ought before to have given the dog a chance to follow the direction of his own instinct, for dumb brutes are much more likely to extricate themselves from such difficulties than men. They followed the dog, and he ran ahead in great glee. Soon he entered a narrow passage, which gradually diminished till it became so small that they were obliged to stoop. Finally the dog seemed to reach the end of the passage, and stuck his nose into a small hole. The animal, apparently having satisfied himself, backed away as if to give his masters a chance to do as he had done. Horace bent down to the hole which the dog had left, and behold! he sees the light of the outer world! He could not be mistaken, for there was the sunshine!

With a shout of ecstasy he calls on "Mr. Graphic to look. Having feasted his eyes on the blessed light of the sun, he turned and commenced caressing old Tiger as their good genius. After their first paroxysms of joy had subsided, Horace exclaimed:

"It is, indeed, worth something to have one more view of the sunlight; but I fear that must be our only satisfaction, for I don't see how we are to get out of that small hole. Even Tiger himself cannot get through it."

"True," said Mr. Graphic, "but we may find some means of enlarging it."

"We are not very well provided with implements for making an opening in the solid rock," suggested Horace.

"You forget," said Mr. Graphic, "that there may be

loose boulders around the opening, as at the place where we entered."

"Even in that case, we have not the stout levers with which we removed those boulders, nor the room to work them, if they were here."

Mr. Graphic examined the aperture carefully, and saw that it opened on a steep mountain-side. On the outside was a heavy boulder covering up the aperture, with the exception of the small hole through which they saw the light of day. The boulder seemed to rest on a bed of pebble stones on the outside; and if they could manage to pry these pebbles from under the boulder, it would roll down the mountain of its own weight, and they would be free. To accomplish this, each had a stout wooden staff, but these seemed hardly adequate to the work. They, however, set about it industriously. Looking about in the cavern, they found a stone to serve for a hammer. Thrusting a staff through the opening, they placed the end of it against a pebble under the boulder. One, with the stone, pounded on the head of the staff until the pebble was driven from under the boulder, and was heard to roll down the mountain. This, to be sure, was but a small beginning toward undermining the boulder, but the rattling of that stone down the mountain was an encouraging token that the work was possible. Placing the staff against another pebble, it was carefully pounded upon, so as not to shatter the frail wooden staff, and soon another pebble was rattling down the rocks. So they kept up the work, the pebbles bowling down the mountain at intervals. Had any one happened along at that time, he would have declared that the goblins of the mountains were hurling stones at him, and the impression would soon have prevailed that ghosts could exercise physical force.

The work proceeded slowly, and after they had continued it far into the night, and completely used up one of their staves, the boulder showed no signs of moving. They partook sparingly of their remaining provisions, and lay down for a short sleep. When they awoke the sun had arisen, and they set immediately about their work. It was encouraging that, while they were imprisoned, it might be with small chances of release, they could actually see the sun. One of their staves was en-

tirely shattered to pieces, and if the other also should become unfit for use, their case was hopeless. They wound the head of it with strands of their rope, and used it with the utmost care. It performed its office well for awhile, but gradually became splintered, in fact almost useless. Still the boulder stood as firm as ever, and their staff will not serve for the removal of more than two or three more pebbles. Now the piece of wood is completely used up. They both put their shoulders against the boulder, and it is as firm as the mountain. With listless purpose, Horace takes the splintered staff, places it against another pebble, and pounds on it in an aimless manner, as if he did not expect to accomplish anything. The pebble starts, and immediately there is a rattling of the other pebbles, and the boulder rolls down the mountain with a crash, like a ricochetting cannon ball shot from a gun of the heaviest caliber! Horace had removed a keystone from among the pebbles, and the remaining structure of cobblestones under the boulder had given away, and the prisoners were free.

They looked at each other in dumb astonishment. They embraced each other and fell on their knees, rendering thanks to the Supreme being, who had released them as by a miracle. They walked forth into the air as men raised from the tomb. Tiger frisked about and barked joyously, as if fully appreciating the deliverance. After their terrible tribulations, it would be impossible to describe their ecstasy as they once more breathed the fragrant air of the mountains, warmed by the rays of the bright sun, and cheered by warbling birds. How different this from the dreary sepulchral cavern, where they had spent the best part of three days!

After praises, and congratulations, they ate what little remained of their provisions, and then set about finding their hut, where they might refresh themselves with a full meal. But what was their astonishment, after traveling for a considerable distance, to find they were not in the valley? They had penetrated through the encircling, precipitous ridge, which hemmed in the valley, and came out on the other side. This fact gradually became impressed upon them; and after recognizing it, they deter-

mined not to attempt to find their way back into the valley, but to start immediately for the Club House. They remembered enough of the landmarks to enable them to find the route by which they came.

Disencumbered of any luggage, they made rapid progress. They were in rather a sorry plight. Mr. Graphic was without a coat, and the clothing of both was much the worse for their subterranean explorations. Their plans for the future demanded that none of the inmates of the Club House should know aught of their adventures. It was therefore arranged to say at the house that they had been lost in the mountains, which would, indeed, be the truth.

"Well," said Horace, as they proceeded on their way, "our labors have not been entirely in vain. We have discovered some of the secrets of that wild valley that will be of great service in a future exploration. With a sufficient force of men, I propose yet to ferret out those redoubtable goblins. After all we have seen, I yet don't believe that those are supernatural beings. I believe that it is some consummate legerdemain. At all events, if they are ghosts, they are not truthful ones. You recollect that, shortly after we entered the cavern, the goblins in the narrow passage told us if we advanced that way, it would be to certain death. But we drove the craven ghosts from their position, and here we are alive yet. You see those were lying ghosts."

"If we did not advance to certain death," said Mr. Graphic, "we went to that which, in my opinion, was infinitely worse than death; and perhaps that is what the goblins meant. As for driving them from their position, I am not so certain but it was their plan of warfare to lead us on where we would stand a good chance to destroy ourselves. They certainly displayed excellent military tactics in that. For my part, I cannot decide in my own mind whether they are goblins or men."

"The Hermit of the Catskills," said Horace, "whom we encountered in the valley, has been the most puzzling being of the whole to me."

"We did not get our hands on him," said Mr. Graphic, "nor have I yet heard of any one who has ever touched him, to be able to say whether he is man or goblin. I

have heard considerable about him at the Club House, but no one has ever been known to come in palpable contact with him."

Horace and Mr. Graphic, and Tiger reached the Club House about the middle of the afternoon. Their explanation of having been lost in the mountains was readily accepted, and they were not closely questioned. With the good cheer provided in the castle, they were in a day or two recuperated, as good as new.

CHAPTER X.

THE GRINDING COURT.

THE Leech Club did, indeed, govern a State and a great City. At least they misgoverned them, as was said by those who had not become dazzled by their abnormal splendors. They did not waste much time and expense in the administration of justice. They wanted the money, which they obtained by their superior ingenuity from the tax-payers, for other, and to their notion, better purposes. Though the Leech Club had plenty of money, they found many other ways of spending it than by maintaining a sufficient number of high-toned judges to administer criminal justice in *their* city. As the city and, of course, the courts belonged to them, they could easily see to it that their friends were not subject to any injustice. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that they looked out that their friends did not get justice done them. Justice was probably the last thing they would have asked for themselves, and the last thing they were willing to concede to those who were not of their number. They had established an entirely new order of things.

They were a progressive people. The old-fogyism of past generations was no part of their polity. The idea had prevailed for ages that law and political economy

were supposed to be founded on justice. They had practically demonstrated that the great principles that underlie the superstructure of government could just as well be founded on injustice. The old proverb, "There is no disputing about tastes," was parodied by the Leech Club, who practically said, "There is no disputing about right." It did, indeed, seem, from their success in wrong doing, that right and wrong were only matters of opinion. Why might it not be just as right to steal your neighbor's property, as to work and soil your own hands for a living? You might still leave him enough to live on; and then, perhaps, he is contented to work, while you can serve the public better in some other capacity. And you may be of a much more liberal nature than the hard-fisted people from whom you steal, who perhaps would only hoard up their hard-earned dollars, never using any of them for the refined purposes of society. You may spend the money in genial, social enjoyments with like spirits as yourself; you may even invite the mudsills from whom you steal, to partake of the fag-ends of your feasts. If you steal a very large pile, you may also build a church, establish a school, endow a professorship—of the science of commendable stealing, for instance—in a college. It is so easy to be liberal with other people's money.

And this is one great argument for the beneficence of stealing. A man is not so apt to be liberal with money which has cost him the toil of his bone and muscle, or the exhausting labor of the brain, while the man who steals large sums, not having, like his less fortunate neighbor, fairly coined his blood into cash, is naturally liberal with that which he obtained at so little cost to himself. Some believe that the largest charities come from those who steal, or obtain by some sort of chicanery, the funds which they so generously give away. Then why is not stealing right, since the thief may give back to public and private charities a portion of the substance which he steals from that same public and from individuals? And if he has impoverished many by his stealing, then that which he gives in charity may go to support, in their poverty, the very persons from whom he stole; and thus, the public, having

cast their bread upon the waters, find it coming back to them after many days. Some persons might say they would rather be their own almoners than to place their substance in the annuity-company of thieves; but people who hold such views are not members of the Leech Club.

As has been intimated, the Leech Club found it unnecessary to maintain an elaborate system of machinery for the administration of justice. They could save money for their own social and beneficent purposes, and much better carry out their new system of political economy—that there is no difference between right and wrong, and that wrong is nearer right than right itself—by having a Grinding Court, which, when set in motion, disposed of cases with the celerity of the much-lauded guillotine, which an ingenious Frenchman is said to have run by steam. This Grinding Court had two hoppers, each one of which was labeled: “Injustice, the true road to justice.”

But since both hoppers were labeled the same, what was the difference between them? Very material. One hopper led to a revolving cylinder set with sharp teeth, like a farmer’s threshing machine, and the victim, plunged into that hopper, if he emerged again at all, came out lacerated like straw, the grain having all been threshed out of him. The other hopper led simply to a wooden cylinder, provided with comfortable seats, and those who went in at this hopper merely became seated, and took a pleasant ride on the cylinder, as on a revolving swing. They came out rather refreshed than otherwise. When a person was brought before the Grinding Court, his punishment depended entirely on which hopper he was put through. If he happened to be a friend of the Leech Club, he went in at the hopper which led to the wooden cylinder, and, swinging around in a manner that reminded him of his childhood’s sports, he came out impressed with admiration of those who could make punishment so pleasant. But if he was unknown to the Leech Club, or what was worse, one whom they regarded with disfavor, then he went in at the hopper which led to the iron-toothed cylinder, and there was little left of him but chaff, or at the best, straw, when he came out. The Club had at their disposal the means of selecting

just such judges and juries as they desired to run this Court.

Any one who incurred the great displeasure of the Leech Club was liable to be brought before the Grinding Court. The unfortunate person might live in the city, or he might reside in the distant rural districts. The Club would conjure up some device to get him within the jurisdiction of their Court, and then grind him through whichever hopper they pleased. If he proved penitent in regard to having offended the Club, there was a possibility that he might get himself put through the wooden machine, and so come out after a little pleasant shaking up, which only jarred a few kernels of grain out of him. But if he proved to be a stickler for principle, he went through the other machine, which was said to be fashioned after the rack of the Inquisition.

It was past midnight, when on one of the much-frequented avenues of the city of the Leech Club, was seen a young man clinging to a lamp-post. It is not an uncommon thing to see men in cities hugging a lamp post as if it were a dear brother. Nor is it so very uncommon in rural villages to see men making love to a sign post, a tree, or other object, whose erectness may lead the weak-kneed individual to infer that they are embracing one of their species who is simply standing there waiting for a shower, to have his thirst slaked by the rains of heaven. Doubtless they say: "Hick—my good fellow—hick—you must be—hick—hard up—hick—to be—hick—wait-in' here—hick—for a drink. Hick—hold me up—hick—a little—hick—and—hick—I'll—hick—treat you."

But the young man referred to, was evidently not one of those accustomed to be caught in such plights. He was plainly, but decently, dressed, his countenance did not wear the besotted appearance of the habitual drinker, and he was apparently from the country. As a policeman approached, two or three well dressed men were seen to disappear around the corner, with an audible chuckle. The young man was taken to the nearest station-house, where he was detained all night, and the next morning he was transferred to the chief city prison. As he was not aware of having committed any crime, he expected to be brought at once to trial and dismissed. But the

Grinding Court was not yet ready to put him through the mill; he was simply brought before that august body and compelled to sign a document, postponing his hearing for several days. He was then conveyed to a loathsome cell in the prison, provided with a straw mattress, alive with vermin and reeking with filth. His pockets had been picked, and if he had any friends in the city who might be disposed to aid him, he could not communicate with them; for the officers of the prison would not stir a peg to do any such act of kindness as to convey a message, short of a fee of ten dollars. He was as good as buried in the tombs, as far as intercourse with the outside world was concerned, and he could only come forth through the process of the Grinding Court. He must wait till the flume-gates were opened, and the current of wrath let upon the wheel which drives the machinery.

He had in his cell, for company, besides the vermin, a fellow-prisoner, about his own age. In conversation, this young man stated that he was a "dry-goods man."

"Ah!" said the countryman, "it seems, then, that it is not uncommon for men of the better class to get in this horrible place. Are you the owner of a dry-goods store, or a clerk?"

"Well, now," said the 'dry-goods man,' "you're a green-un—green as a young gull jist out o' the shell."

"What do you mean then, pray, by saying you are a dry-goods man?"

"Why, gawky, I'm a sort of commercial traveler, that goes about among the large stores examinin' samples. When I come across a sample as pleases me, I take it, that is, if no one happens to be lookin'. I've a good many ways of gettin' off with it. Sometimes I drop my high-crowned hat accidentally on the floor, stoop down, pick it up, put the costly piece of goods in it, and put it back on my head. Then agin I manage to git the goods inside my coat, where I have a place fixed for it. Sometimes I make believe I want to fix my garter, and stick the goods inside my boot. You see, if you only git the right kind of goods, a piece worth a hundred or two of dollars don't make any bulk at all, hardly. When I make a good haul this way, I always buy and pay for some article before leavin' the store, to drive away suspicion. But I wouldn't

advise you to go into this kind of business without first servin' a 'prenticeship, for it needs one as knows how, and he must be a good judge of goods."

The countryman now began to comprehend that his fellow prisoner was a shop-lifter, and he evidently had no desire to go into this kind of dry-goods business, for he made no remark on the explanation of the other. After a short pause the "dry-goods man" said:

"Tell me, now pal, what you're in here for."

"That," said the countryman, "is more than I know myself. I was persuaded by some city people who were staying in the country near where I live, to come to the city. They said this was the place for a young man to rise in the world, and that they would get me a situation in a wholesale house as a salesman, where I would soon be able to make three thousand dollars a year. They even took so much interest in my case as to send a young man with me to the city, to introduce me to the firm who wanted a salesman from the country. The young man who came with me to the city soon fell in with three of his acquaintances, and he left me at a hotel with these, while he went to see the firm that was to hire me. I have not seen him since. While he was gone, we all sat down to a private table by ourselves, in the hotel, to take dinner. There was wine on the table, and the young men drank freely of it, and invited me to do the same. I did not care to drink it, but they poured out a glass and pressed it on me. I only drank two glasses. I don't know what happened afterwards. This morning I awoke and found myself a prisoner in the station-house. Soon after, I was brought to this prison. What I am charged with, and how this has all happened, is a mystery; for I know that two small glasses of wine could not have made me drunk."

Here the dry-goods man put his finger to his nose, and ejaculated:

"Drugged!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, them fellers that eat dinner with you, drugged your wine."

"But they were friends of the young man that came

to the city to aid me in getting a situation. They certainly would not do such a thing as that."

"Did you have any money?"

"Only twenty dollars, and I know that men dressed like them, with diamond rings on their fingers, and gold watches in their pockets, and plenty of money as I saw them have, would not take the trouble to drug me for twenty dollars."

"May be they expected to get more; and may be you stood in their way, and kept them from gettin' a larger pile."

"I don't see how that could be. I rather fear that they have all been murdered for their gold watches, diamonds and money; while I have escaped because I had nothing worth killing me for."

"You needn't be a bit afeared of that."

"Now, pal," continued the dry-goods man after a short pause, "let me give you a bit of good advice. When you're brought up afore the Court, plead guilty."

"Guilty of what? I've done nothing."

"No matter, plead guilty. It's hot weather, and the Court don't like to be bothered investigatin' cases. If you jist plead guilty, and don't give the Court any trouble, you'll likely git off with thirty days in the stone quarries at the penitentiary. But if you go to bother'n' 'em, ten chances to one if you don't git six or nine months."

"I shall not plead guilty when I know I'm innocent; and they cannot send me to the penitentiary for anything I have done. Some one ought to be sent to the quarries for robbing me."

"Pal, I know the ropes of this ere city better'n you do. Take a friend's advice, and don't depend too much on innocence to git you clear. Why, I've knowed men jist like you, that wasn't used to drinkin', to git the worse of a glass or two, or may be they'd been drugged, and found tight in the streets. And when they was brought into court, they thought they'd git clear because they hadn't done nothing. So they'd plead not guilty, and the judge would git mad because they bothered the court, and sent them for six months; when if they'd plead guilty, they wouldn't ha' got more'n thirty days at the outside."

"I'll tell you, pal," continued the dry-goods man,

"how things is done here. The court don't take any trouble to find out whether a man's guilty or not. All they care about is to git through with the cases, and not injure their friends. If a man's got friends outside, or political influence, there is no danger of him at all. He will be discharged at sight. No matter what he's done, if he's got friends among the rulers of the city, when he's brought into court, he'll be discharged with only the least bit of an excuse for a hearin'. And if the man that appears agin him should stick to it, and try to have him convicted, the chances is that the prosecutor will git sent to the cells, and the other will go out on bail. Why, I once seen a man brought into court for stealin' a stranger's watch and money. The feller had the watch, and give it up to the stranger right there in court, but he said he had spent the money, and couldn't give that up. The judge then ordered the man to be discharged from arrest, and was goin' to dismiss the case right there, but the stranger insisted on havin' him detained for the money. The judge then growled out at the stranger that he ought to be satisfied with gettin' his watch back. He told the stranger that if he persisted in that sort o' thing, he would have to send him to the cells to be kept as a witness in the case, while the thief would go out on bail. The stranger had no friend near to help him, and as he wanted to leave the city the next mornin', he got out of that court in a hurry, you better bleve; for if he'd said another word, the judge would ha' sent him below to the cells in a second, and some one was standin' right there to go the thief's bail, and he'd ha' gone out about his bisness.

"Sometimes a man as has got friends, has got nabbed right in the act of liftin' somethin', or gits taken inside of a store that he's 'cracked,' and they can't git by sendin' him up for a little while. He employs the right kind of a lawyer, who enters a plea of 'guilty of petty larceny,' when the crime was most likely burglary. The plea is accepted, and the court sentences him for thirty, sixty or ninety days. If he'd plead not guilty, and stood trial, he'd been convicted of burglary or grand larceny, and sent to State Prison for five or ten years. I'll tell you what I'm goin to do. I got spotted liftin' two costly pieces of goods worth five hundred dollars. I'd sold one piece, but a de-

ductive smoked me out, and found the other piece in my possession. Now I've engaged a lawyer to put in a plea of 'guilty of petty larceny,' and I won't be sent up for more'n thirty or sixty days. But you see I made a clean two hundred dollars out of the piece I sold; so, after payin' my lawyer a hundred dollars, I'll have a hundred left for my month's, or at most two months' quarryin' stone; which ain't so very bad after all, seein' I know the ropes, and won't have to work very hard. When I git out, some one'll have to pay dear for it, for in less than three days I'll have a thousand dollars for every month I'm sent up.

"I say, pal, if you could only git that lawyer of mine to take care of your case, he'd git you clear, I warrant. But you couldn't git him short of a fee of fifty dollars, and you hain't got it. So the only way, as I tell you, is to plead guilty, and not make the judges mad by bother'n 'em, and they'll give you a light sentence."

"But," said the countryman, "how can I be sent to the penitentiary for being drugged and robbed? Do they punish a man here because a crime has been committed against him?"

"Don't I tell you," said the dry-goods man, "that they won't trouble themselves to find out whether you've committed a crime or not. It is enough that you're here, and they've got to dispose of you in some way. You may be in somebody's way, that wants to put you aside. Some of the rulers of the city may want to git you out of the way. Your case is ten times as bad as that of a man that really has done somethin', but has friends in the city that can control votes. I tell you, pal, votes here is everything. Me and my friends sometimes help the rulers to quite a pile of votes, for we all manage to vote a good many times on 'lection day. That is one reason why I always find friends in the courts. But you're a stranger, and have got no friends nor no votes at your back, and the court won't care a peg whether you've done some crime agin somebody, or whether some one has done a crime agin you."

After three days spent in the loathsome cell, where he was eaten by vermin and sickened by the stale and unwholesome food of the prison, the countryman, with a

gang of about fifty, was ushered into the room of the Grinding Court. The prisoners were packed into a box in the court room, thicker than even beasts for the slaughter were crammed together in a butcher's pen, before stringent laws were passed against cruelty to animals. The weather was extremely hot, and the position in the box was fearful. If a sentence to the penitentiary was to relieve them from this predicament, it would certainly be welcomed by most of the unfortunates.

Soon the wheels of the Grinding Court were started, and the prisoners were put through with the rapidity of cotton going through a picker. Some who were charged with high crimes, even to murder, found no one appearing against them, and were dismissed without further inquiry. In some respects it reminded one of an auction sale—a mock-auction, for instance. The name of a prisoner would be called, and the clerk would cry out, "Guilty or not guilty?" The plea might be "guilty," it might be "not guilty;" there might be a witness called or not—the court, with the same rapid utterance as the auctioneer, who says, "going, going, going, gone!" enunciated its decrees and sentences: "Thirty days! Sixty days! Three months! Discharged! Six months! Discharged! One year! Discharged!"

These decrees were enunciated without any apparent relevancy to the pleas of "guilty," or "not guilty," or the charges preferred against the prisoner, or the evidence brought forward. It might, however, be observed that those who plead guilty at once, received the lightest sentences, and that those who attempted any defense, fared the worst. Many who admitted their guilt, were discharged, while many who felt assured in their own consciences that they had committed no act calling for punishment, received severe sentences. The court apparently paid little attention to plea or evidence, but sentenced according to its whim.

The proceedings of the Grinding Court soon thinned out the crowd in the box, and the few who were left were greatly relieved from the horrible, sandwiched condition. We can now take a minute survey of those still remaining to be run through the mill. But hark! What name was

that we heard? It sounded familiar. A second time it is called, and we are not mistaken.

"John Woodman!"

Indeed, John, how come you in such company as this? Why did you leave your rustic home in the Catskills? Why did you abandon your honest toil, your frugal but comfortable living, to expose yourself to the putrid pitfalls of this great moral cemetery—whose graves have been dug open by hyenas, in league with vultures, the foul quadruped and bird stalking together over the great charnel cess-pool, ready to devour all who may fall into the pits, or be stricken down helpless by the awful stench arising from the festering carrion? Did you think, John, inexperienced, you could walk among a hundred thousand yawning, greedy graves, and not find your own sepulchre? Why did you leave your widowed mother? Why did you leave Phebe Greenwood, who loved you?

But as we begin to succumb to the fact, and fully acknowledge to ourselves that it is, indeed, you, we recognize the same countryman who was confined in the cell with the so-called "dry-goods man," and we are answered. We recollect your conversation. You said you were persuaded by a city gentleman staying in the country, to come to the city, and accept a situation at a good salary. We see! You perhaps thought you could achieve a situation that would make you more acceptable to Phebe Greenwood, or at all events, to her father.

We don't blame you, John; your ambition was laudable. But how disastrously has your scheme terminated. You will doubtless be shot from the mill of this Grinding Court into the penitentiary. And will Phebe Greenwood or her father entertain your suit after such a disgrace? Will you be able to establish your innocence to their satisfaction?

Ah! a ray of light flashes across our mental vision. We think we can discern the hand of that refined exquisite, Mr. Sindandy, in getting you to the city and disgracing you. Can it be possible he has done this to get you out of the way, so that his confrere, Mr. Flitaway, can have a fair field with Phebe Greenwood, who despises him and his set!

"John Woodman!" was called by the Grinding Court.

“Guilty, or not guilty?”

“Of what charge?” answered John.

He received no light on that subject, but a policeman was put on the stand as a witness, testifying to having seen the prisoner taxing, or we might say, blackmailing a lamp-post, to the extent of making that erect, firm and faithful dispenser of light to the benighted city, hold him up, when he was not able to stand alone. The policeman further testified to having relieved the virtuous lamp-post from the too free embraces of the libertine, John, and put the latter in the station-house. Thus all chaste lamp-posts incurred a debt of eternal gratitude to the vigilant policeman; for their purity was no longer threatened by a ruthless debauchee, who was in a fair way to be brought to a proper sense of his rakish propensities. Hereafter let lamp-posts understand that, though they be left alone through the dreary hours of the night as lighthouses shining over the sea of deviltry, their chastity is under the care of the Grinding Court, which will pulverize into dust the voluptuary who dares to approach these vestal virgins with undue gallantry.

Having heard these heinous charges against him, John Woodman was about to address the court. What presumption! To think that immaculate, infallible body was going to waste its precious time to hear him defend himself! Had it not just been proven that he had been caught in the very act of treating with unencouraged, and lewd gallantry the decorous and pure lamp-post? The judges of the Grinding Court were members of the Leech Club, and they could enjoy themselves much better in hieing away to the country in that hot weather, and joining in the pastimes of their confreres, and helping to spend the money that flowed into the Leech Club coffers in such a constant stream, that they hardly knew what to do with the lucre. John had no more than essayed to address the court, than one of the judges simply ejaculated:

“One year!”

A policeman tapped John on the shoulder, and motioned to him to come along. There was no chance for parley. He might better have addressed the rocks of his native Catskills; for those cold objects would no more

than have treated him with silent indifference, while a persistent effort to speak to the judges would have added to his punishment. He was taken back to his cell, utterly prostrated, stupefied with the thought that he had suddenly been metamorphosed from a respectable citizen into a convicted criminal, doomed to disgraceful labor in the quarries for a whole year. As he sank down on the hard floor of his cell, he wept like a child, exclaiming :

“Oh ! my God ! What evil genius is presiding over my destinies, that I should have come here to be chained like a dog in a penal quarry ! Hope, dreams of ambition, love, all dashed out, as one snuffs out a candle !”

He lay flat on his back on the cold stone floor, as one dead. His fellow prisoner added taunts, reminding him of the advice he had received, and telling him how much better he would have fared if he had only plead guilty. But John heard him not.

The next day John was mustered into line with a motley band of convicts, preparatory to being packed into the “Black Maria,” a close vehicle, which was to convey them to the vessel on which they were to be taken to their island prison. As John stepped upon the sidewalk, a shudder came over him as he viewed the convict wagon, in which he must take his seat. He recollected once seeing prisoners depart from the county jail for the State Prison, to which they had been sentenced. He thought at the time how abject was their condition, and how irretrievable their disgrace. Now he thought people looked on him with similar feelings.

Never were sheep for the slaughter packed in a wagon with such utter disregard of their feelings, as were the prisoners in the “Black Maria” on that hot day ; for the owner of the animals would have at least had more regard for his pocket than thus to endanger their lives. And the position of the prisoners on the boat was not at all improved. They were crammed into the hold of the vessel, with as little regard to life as if they had been bales of goods. It was a great wonder that some had not been smothered on the passage.

As John was ushered from the boat upon the landing, before the grim walls of the merciless prison, the first

thing that particularly caught his attention was an inscription over the door:

"The way of the transgressor is hard!"

He tried to think wherein he had been such a great transgressor that that passage should thus apparently join with his persecutors, and stand up there to accuse him. But he was allowed no time for reflection. He was hurried in, and as the gloomy portal closed behind, he felt as if the sepulcher had closed its marble jaws upon him, and that he was entering upon a future state without a ray of hope to light him through eternity. Soon the inexorable discipline of the prison coiled itself around him like an iron shroud, that would crush the last gasp of hope from his bosom. His hair was cut short, and he had to don the striped livery of crime.

But few mechanical trades were in vogue in the prison, and all who could not work at these, were employed in the quarry. With pick and crowbar John was soon delving side by side with convicts. The wretched discipline of the prison was soon apparent. The professional thieves, who had been several times in the penitentiary, would impose on the uninitiated right before the eyes of the keepers, who seemed to encourage and enjoy the sport. If an inexperienced prisoner was possessed of any article which the old stagers took a fancy to, it was not an uncommon thing for them to seize and rob him in presence of the keepers, who would look on and laugh. If the pilfered prisoner threatened to report the keeper to the warden, the keeper would be sure to get the start of him, by preferring some charge against the persecuted convict, and having him punished for an offense which he had not committed. Thus the new comers soon learned to keep silence, no matter what impositions and abuse might be heaped upon them.

And here we must leave John Woodman for the present, to the infernal devices of hardened convicts, and not less wicked keepers; to hard labor in the fervid stone-quarries beneath the scorching rays of a summer's sun, with such food to support him under these hardships as a dog would turn away from in disgust; and, worse than all, to his corroding thoughts, and outraged heart, which never ceased to tell him that the best aims of a once

hopeful and buoyant life had been blighted, through one of the most unaccountable accidents, and all through no apparent fault of his own. We will leave him here, and wait for a day of retribution, when those who planned such a terrible wrong shall be scorched in the fire which they themselves kindled, and bitten by the vipers which they nourished, unconsoled by the reflection that they suffer without having committed an adequate crime.

CHAPTER XI.

UP THE HUDSON.

ON a glorious summer afternoon, one of those splendid steamers aptly described as river palaces, plowed her way up the Hudson. Crowds of people swarmed upon her decks, and languished upon settees and chairs in her saloons. There seemed absolutely no unoccupied room on the spacious steamer. Chairs and camp-stools covered nearly all the available space on her decks, and what was not thus occupied was appropriated by those who were glad to obtain even a standee where they could snuff the breezes which had gathered the fragrance of meadow, garden, grove and flowery woodland; the combined aroma of the whole being tempered and softened by the river as the zephyrs kissed the waves.

The crowd were hurrying away from the great city at the mouth of the river, and they might have regarded the resplendent steamer as a water-nymph angel sent to bear them on her back, flying over the foam, from Sodom. They had left its crowded and stifling dwellings, its blistering pavements, its sun-reflecting brick walls, for the country. They had left behind them ten times ten thousand miseries, perhaps uncared-for, at least unthought-of. The sufferings of the poor in a great city are by no means confined to the pinching winter. Summer may bring them work and food, but it also brings them in their

pent-up habitations the wasting miasmas arising from filth which lies seething in the scorching sun. It brings them a debilitating atmosphere from the fiery furnace of the streets, with their continuous surface of heat-absorbing pavements and walls of buildings, still further vitiated by circulation among the over-packed dwellings of the poor. Thus, in the great city, the air, in its sluggish circulation, gathers foulness from frequent breathings, and becomes pregnant with heat, and miasma, and death.

The crowd on the steamer were flying away from these miseries as men do from a pestilence. The sick and debilitated might languish in the pestiferous apartments, gasping the air which had become almost as deadly as the fumes of the Upas tree; the prisoner in his cell might place his nostrils at the small port-hole window, to inhale as much as possible of the air, which, though so poor, is given to him most grudgingly; or he might toil away beneath the torrid sun in the quarry—the passengers on the steamer had escaped the wrath that involved so many; they were free to breathe the wholesome air of the river and the mountains, and there was no reason why they should not enjoy themselves. There were undoubtedly some on that steamer who had caused a portion of the miseries herein mentioned, but to all outward appearances their consciences did not trouble them, and they enjoyed the bracing atmosphere as if they were ministering angels instead of instruments of evil. There were doubtless those on the boat who had ground the poor, and left them to stifle in the crammed, unventilated tenement houses of the day. There were quite probably merchants who had wrested from the niggardly-required toil of sewing-girls and widows the means by which they were able to sport at watering places, while their wretchedly-paid employes were left to swelter in the miasma of the city. There were those on board who had conspired to send the innocent to prison and penal servitude, while they themselves reveled in freedom, and desecrated and poisoned the free air of heaven by breathing it into their false bosoms.

As the steamer bore the crowd swiftly along, the city from which they hurried presented a magnificent panorama. Spires arising from the wilderness of houses; massive domes capping lofty structures; here and there

a street with a splendid row of buildings, which, in the distance, appeared like one great edifice set off by a row of symmetrical columns; a sea of roofs gilded and shaded into many colors by the brilliant sun—altogether rendered the scene one of vastness and grandeur. And the effect was heightened by the numerous sails which whitened the harbor, and the ships with sails furled lining the wharves. The steamer herself seemed like a thing of life as she intelligently kept on her course among the numerous craft—ships, sloops, schooners, tugs—now passing almost under the forefoot of a majestic vessel under a full spread of canvas; now veering a little to go astern of some floating leviathan which was too near to warrant her sailing across her bow; now passing a vessel so near that you might almost spring from one to the other.

Finally the city grows thin, and the steamer is getting up where crowded and busy streets give place to quiet villas, and beautiful country residences. Instead of a space covered with stone, brick and mortar, tall spires, huge domes, grand colonnades, and an endless sea of roofs, we have the graceful rural architecture, set off by enchanting groves of trees, green and closely shaven lawns, terrace rising above terrace instead of the paved street—by this means the dwellings standing farther back from the river obtaining as fine a view as those in front. In many places, even within the corporate limits of the city, the primeval forest crowns the river bluffs, and among these the villas are built. A recent shower had cleaned the foliage of the trees and the lawns of all accumulations of dust, giving to everything a fresh appearance. Thus the grass and the foliage presented a soft green, which contrasted with the neat and often grand edifices and the water, in the most fascinating manner.

Some who have traveled in Europe have objected to the scenery of the Hudson that it has no ruins to add venerableness and picturesqueness to its banks. Many think that a few ruined towers, and monasteries, and castles with crumbling walls and donjon-keeps, would greatly improve its scenery. But people who take this view have not a proper eye to the fitness of things.

America is the outcropping of the spirit of liberty in Europe which repudiated the barbarous system of feudalism that made castles and donjon-keeps necessary. Our scenery is the scenery of the new polity, and has nothing in it to represent the, dark ages in which the furious, arrogant, feudal lords imprisoned or put to the rack, within their domestic fortresses, the peasant who dared to question their right to his services in war or peace. It is an abnormal state of society which ruined towers and castles represent; and such may be proper accompaniments of the scenery in countries where the system of which they were a part, was in vogue for ages. But in this country they would be an excrescence; for they can only be interesting in connection with a history; and there is nothing in our history to warrant their existence, and we are glad of it. The dark cruelties and tyranny which underlie the foundations of European ruins find no place in our history. The oppressive aristocracy built the now crumbling castles of the old world, and drove those on whom the light of liberty dawned, to the new. They came here to enjoy in their own day and generation a measure of human rights, which the agitation of centuries could only establish in Europe. America is the place where men first emerged from the barbarism of old, and its scenery should be in keeping with the new idea of progress. A beautiful scene appeals to the mind as well as to the eye, and we want no object incongruous with our history. We want nothing but the thrifty works of progressive men, and the unique works of the God of Nature and of Liberty—the sturdy woodland, the green grove, glade, meadow and hillside, the rugged mountain studded with rocks as eternal as the principles of the rights of man. If, under our system, a sordid clique of men, for a time, get control, and wrong individuals and the public, the quickly returning tide of the ballot soon brings its revenges and reliefs. They cannot permanently fasten an unjust system upon the country, as did the feudal lords of Europe.

The vigorous craft steamed on up the Hudson, soon leaving all vestiges of the city behind. As the last of the great living metropolis is left in her wake, there arises on the opposite shore a remarkable formation, so regular

that a stranger, in twilight, might take it for the wall of some ancient city long since fallen to decay. The Palisades might, with a very little stretch of the imagination, be taken for the wall of a pre-Adamite city, whose inhabitants had as great a penchant for fortification as the Chinese.

The steamer bore her exuberant freight swiftly over the sparkling water, now stirred into foaming, crested waves by a stiff breeze. Bright villages, charming country residences, wooded bluffs, jutting points of land, fringed with foliage and graced by fine dwellings, were passed by the gallant boat as a comet rushes through a field of stars. It is doubted if any stream on earth exceeds in varied beauties—sometimes approaching grandeur—the majestic Hudson. Finally the river appears to the passenger on the boat to be entirely shut off ahead by mountains. We are approaching the Highlands.

As the steamer draws nearer to what appeared to be the limit of the expansive water, the river is seen to wend its tortuous way through the mountains. We are now in the midst of the most picturesque of the far-famed scenery of the Hudson. The mountains are not lofty as compared with the noted ranges of the globe; but their rugged abruptness, rising from the water of the winding river, in a hundred remarkable and indescribable shapes, render them unique almost beyond comparison. Sometimes a massive mound arises in a well defined cone or pyramid. Sometimes a mountain arises from the very bed of the river, with an abruptness that would apparently enable a person to jump from its top a thousand feet or more and alight in the water. Rugged promontories jut into the river, and bays and coves are thus formed within mountain gorges. Looking back from the river into the mountain recesses, wild ravines, frowning in shade or laughing in sunshine, are seen traversing the solitudes in every direction.

What renders the scene most charming is the green foliage which covers the most rugged mountain sides. Even on the most precipitous steeps, which apparently consist of little but rock, the shrubbery finds sticking places, and takes root, clothing the rocky battlement with green in summer. The heavens were partially obscured

with clouds, but occasionally the sun would break through, pouring down here and there a stream of golden light on the soft green of the rugged mountains. While some ravines and gorges which were favored with these occasional gleams of sunshine seemed to acknowledge their appreciation of the boon by a rugged smile, others in which Sol had not showered down his beneficent rays, looked savage, as if growling because they had not also received a mouthful of radiance.

Onward bowled the steamer, sometimes approaching so near the rocky cliffs that one might almost jump ashore from her decks; then tearing away into the middle of the stream, the swells from her wake rushing in noisy breakers upon the rock-walled beach. Sometimes the vessel would be aiming under a full head of steam toward the precipitous shore, there seeming literally to be no farther egress by water, as if she were going directly upon the rocks in despair of finding an outlet. Her bow would approach within a few lengths of the bold promontory, when she would sheer easily and gracefully around, revealing to the passengers the opening through the mountains where the river finds its course. Every mile reveals some novelty in the river and mountain scenery.

The noble stream, though pent in by the inexorable granite walls, is seldom much less than half a mile wide, and the manner in which the water has pierced every vulnerable point, and formed a diversity of bays and coves, into which the swells dash with mad violence upon the rocky shore, suggests the idea that the river waged a gallant fight with the stubborn mountains when it first broke its way through their opposing forces, long ages ago; when, perhaps, the rocks were softer and more yielding than now. All the efforts of the Hudson now to widen its channel through the Highlands are unavailing. It may send its breakers tearing like a mighty volley from the water-sprite artillery upon the shore. It makes no more impression than preaching does upon the hard hearts of stock-gamblers in Wall street. The stony cliffs look down upon the lapping waters, which vainly try to sap their foundations, with as perfect indifference as a broker who had stolen a railroad would upon a little Sun-

day School boy who might essay to deter him from the theft by holding up before him the catechism and pointing to the eighth commandment. As the broker would tell the lad that such things were intended for effect before hearts were hardened, so the cliff, in effect, says to the river that it should have exerted its force to the utmost while the rocks were soft.

Occasionally a little clearing is seen between the abrupt mountain and the river, but little larger than the dwelling which has been erected upon it. The persons who have located upon such pent-up limits can be conceived to have done so for no other purpose than to make voyagers on the river wonder how they find a living among the rocks. In a few instances the clearings expand into several acres, green as a paradise. Generally, however, the Highlands, with the exception of a few small villages, present an appearance as wild as when the enterprising navigator who gave his name to the stream, first sailed up the river.

The steamer passes the historical ground of West Point, where, besides the splendid structures of art, is seen the only ruin of note along the Hudson—old Fort Putnam, of Revolutionary fame, on a high rocky ridge, some distance back from the river. Its walls are in a fair state of preservation, and many of its casemates are still standing. Soon the steamer draws near to the northern gate of the Highlands, with its lofty pillars on either side. The vessel passes close to the massive pillar of rock on the west side. Shooting past this, the mountains are seen to break suddenly away on the west, and slowly but unmistakably on the east, and an open and fertile country is revealed. Besieging civilization has pushed its conquests close up to the gate of the wild Highlands, and its cottages, and summer resorts under the very shadow of the pillars. As the vessel steams up the now broad stream, which expands into a beautiful bay, the city of the hill is seen on the west, and a continuous village on the east. No more lofty mountains are seen till the Catskills loom up toward the clouds. But the scenery all the way is, nevertheless, delightful. Alternately, wooded bluffs, thriving towns, cozy villas, splendid country seats, line the shore; while green fields, and ridges, intermingled with woodland, spread away in the distance.

Hitherto, we have paid little attention to the individuality of the passengers on the vessel. Many of them had already landed at the various places where the steamer had touched, and dispersed among the rural retreats whither they were bound. The crowd is now so much thinned out that we are able to distinguish some old acquaintances. A group is gathered on the upper deck, seated on stools, and conversing quite earnestly. We hear the unmistakable, mincing tones of Mr. Sindandy, the pompous style of Mr. Swellup, the rich German-English of Mr. Swillager, the lofty, dignified conversation of Mrs. Grandola, the exquisite verbiage of Miss Gossamer. These excellent people had doubtless been to the city for a short season, and were returning to their castle in the Catskills. There was a young woman, evidently belonging to the party, but not so flashily dressed, sitting somewhat apart from the others. Then there was Mary Shoeman in close communion with the party. While she had not yet acquired the volubility of her new acquaintances, she had made some progress in adopting their gorgeous style of dress. She was an attentive listener to the charming chat of Mr. Sindandy. He had so far advanced in his suit, as to call Miss Shoeman by her first name.

"Have you hea'd, Mary," said he, "how badly one of youah old neighbos has turned out?"

"No! Who?"

"John Woodman."

"Why, what has he been doing?"

"He went to the city, committed some crime; and has been sent to the penitentiary."

"Why, did I ever! Well, I told Phebe Greenwood that she would disgrace herself by keeping company with him, and that I couldn't see how she could do it when such a fine fellow as Mr. Flitaway was disposed to be so attentive to her."

"You are right, Mary. I nevah could see why a young lady of Miss Greenwood's prospects could throw herself away on such a booh, when fo'tune threw her equals in her way. I hope now she will see her errah, and look upon Mistah Flitaway with moah favah."

"I don't doubt but she will," said Mary. "I shall go

and tell her about this just as quick as I get home. She thought John was going to the city to make his fortune. She had the presumption to tell me that some day John would stand far above my—I mean—why—she said some day John would stand far above even you, Mr. Sindandy. I guess she'll change here tune now."

The party continued to discuss the demerits of John Woodman, indulging in reflections by no means complimentary to that unfortunate person, till the steamer landed at the point where they were to disembark. Remaining over night at a hotel near the landing, the next morning they disappeared among the Catskills.

CHAPTER XII.

HORACE LACKFATHE MEETS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

SEVERAL vehicles, constructed especially for traveling over the rude mountain roads, affording as much comfort as possible to the occupants, arrived at the castle of the Leech Club late in the afternoon following the day on which the party mentioned were observed on the steamer sailing up the Hudson. They were the same individuals who composed the party referred to. Horace Lackfathe, with some other inmates of the castle, went out to meet the new-comers. He gave his hand to assist from one of the vehicles the young lady mentioned as having had little fellowship with the party on the boat. As she alighted upon the ground, and their eyes happened to meet, both stood as if confounded.

"Charity Faithful!" said Horace, in a low tone, which was nevertheless as earnestly emphatic as if it had been thundered from the clouds.

"Horace Lackfathe!" replied the lady in similar suppressed tones of astonishment. "Had you come forth from an opening in the rocks, I could not have met with a greater surprise!"

"I am not quite sure but I have come here thus," said Horace.

"What do you mean?" said the lady, in a low voice full of anxiety. "Pray, do explain! Are all the strange and vague stories I hear about this place true? But it is a comfort to find you here, Horace. I know you would not be among these people if they were what some reports charge them with being. But do tell me how it is, Horace!"

"It is too long a story to tell you now," said Horace. "Our conversation is already attracting attention. Wait till a more favorable opportunity."

Horace affectionately pressed the hand of the lady, when no one was looking, and left her, as if he were not an acquaintance, but had only been rendering her necessary assistance. The party retired within the castle.

The meeting of this young woman, toward whom Horace cherished a warmer feeling than mere friendship, was another incident in the chain of wonders that he had encountered in this strange locality. What had brought her here, it was needless for him to conjecture, and after the severe discipline that he had received in prying into the mysteries of the Catskills, he found no great difficulty in suppressing a nervous curiosity until he could learn from the lips of the young woman herself the cause of her coming here. And it may naturally be inferred that the lady was equally puzzled at meeting Horace in the mountains. They had not met before in a long time, but little missives had occasionally passed between them, and she, with the faith of a true woman, had never doubted Horace's constancy.

They met at the table, but it was as strangers. During the afternoon of the next day after her arrival, they planned a meeting in an arbor near the lake. The inmates of the castle were enjoying their siestas, and they were not disturbed in their interview.

"My dear Charity!" was the first exclamation from Horace, as his arm drew her close to him. After the first raptures and congratulations of their meeting were over, she said:

"Now tell me, how came you here, Horace? Are you a member of that singular organization called the Leech Club?"

"What do you take me for, Charity? Do you know

that that question is equivalent to asking me if I am a thief and a plunderer?"

"Oh! good gracious, Horace, do you mean to say that we are in a den of robbers? But that cannot be, for, although this is a wild solitary place, there seems to be no effort at concealment; and if there was, the authorities would soon find it out."

"I don't mean that the Leech Club are exactly the kind of robbers you refer to. They are public robbers, who plunder by virtue of owning the law and the courts."

"I see what you mean, and I have heard such things before; but I had hoped for the sake of my poor mother that such reports were nothing but scandal, as my step-father, Mr. Swellup, says they are."

"He your step-father!" said Horace, looking greatly grieved.

"Yes, but you don't blame me for it, Horace? I certainly had nothing to do with bringing it about."

"No, no, dear Charity," said Horace, evidently ashamed that he had given her reason to surmise that he might think less of her on account of any accidental connections. "I only was thinking that you were too good to be so related."

"But, indeed, Horace, do you believe these stories that some tell about the dishonesty of the Leech Club?"

"Believe them, Charity! Why there's not a day passes but I hear a statement of them from their own mouths. They speak of their rascally performances as naturally and shamelessly as you or I would of the most praiseworthy acts in the world."

"Well, Horace, since you speak of it, I have frequently heard Mr. Sindandy, and even my step-father Swellup, talk of their methods of conducting business, especially political matters, which I have often told my mother were nothing less than infamous. But she, poor soul, seemed so worried by it that I never felt like pursuing the subject far. She would tell me that I did not understand politics, and that I must be mistaken about the immorality of their practices, and so the subject would drop."

"Yes, Charity, that is their mode of operating. They are trying to debauch the public mind into the belief that there is no difference between right and wrong."

"But, Horace, you have not yet told me how you came to be domiciled among these people, whom you seem to hold in such great abhorrence."

Horace here related to her the circumstance of his accidental visit to the castle of the Leech Club, and his wonderful experience during his brief residence there. As he proceeded, she became stupefied with wonder, and fairly shrieked as he related some of the most remarkable passages, clinging to him as if she feared the goblins of the mountains would make a sudden raid upon them, and carry them off to be immured in their dismal prison-cave. After Horace concluded the relation, both remained silent for some time, till Charity had somewhat recovered from the terror with which the story had inspired her.

"Truly, Horace," said she, "I never even read anything half so terrible as what you have just told me—not even in the most exciting story books that I ever saw."

After pausing a little while, she made several attempts to continue, but each time failed to utter more than a word or two. Finally, after a great effort, she said:

"Horace, I have something to say that I must say now. I have from the first of our acquaintance practiced a little deception on you, which I cannot let remain any longer unexplained. I hope, Horace, after I have told you, that you will not think it was *very* wrong."

Horace looked surprised, but replied that he did not consider her capable of doing anything really sinful. She continued:

"When we first became acquainted in the village where you resided, it was commonly understood that I was a school teacher who came there to spend the summer vacation. The deception lies in this, Horace, that I was not the penniless girl that I was represented to be. I wish I was, for then I would not have been driven to the subterfuge of seeking friends who might respect me for myself, instead of fawning on me for my expectant wealth. The deception succeeded, for I found worthy people who treated the reputed poor school teacher with all kindness and courtesy. You know the rest, Horace. But I owe it to myself to say that my expectant wealth, or the property of my mother, was not derived from any one connected with the Leech Club. It is inherited from

people who made it honestly. Some years ago, my mother was deceived into contracting a marriage with Mr. Swellup. Too late she discovered his true character, and happiness is a stranger to her bosom. If you have observed about this establishment a sad looking lady, not loaded with ridiculous finery like the rest of them, you have seen my mother. Now I have told you my story. I hope you will forgive me, Horace, for the deception."

Horace was grieved, but knowing how utterly friendless Charity must feel among these people, he concealed his chagrin, kindly forbearing to add to her troubles by showing by look or word that he felt a pang because his betrothed was in different circumstances than he, in regard to property. This was not, he thought, the Charity Faithful whom he had loved. *His* Charity was poor like himself, while this one was rich. However, with an effort, he said in tones which seemed to be natural :

"Forgive you, indeed, Charity ! I ought to love you the more for abandoning the consideration your wealth might have brought you, and accepting the attentions of one who can give you only his hand and a poor, doubting, lacerated heart."

"Oh ! I am so thankful, Horace, that you do not upbraid me for deceiving you. My step-father is constantly persecuting me because I will not encourage the attentions of some of the soulless fops who follow in his train ; and had I received an unkind word from you, Horace, on account of that little deception, it would have driven me to distraction."

"I would deserve to be ranked with the Leech Club, were I capable of saying aught unkind to one so true."

It was now time for their interview to be brought to a close, for they were both anxious that their intimacy should not be discovered. Horace gave Charity a parting kiss, and she returned to the castle, while he wandered about the grounds, to collect and analyze his thoughts. It was not many minutes before he met Mr. Graphic, and Horace broke forth in a transport of agony :

"Oh ! my friend, everything seems to conspire to make me miserable ! I have just met in the most unaccountable manner the one whom I have long looked upon as destined to hold toward me the dearest rela-

tion on earth. She came with those who returned from the city last night. And what new development of the infernal conspiracy that I have run into in these mountains, while trying to escape for a season from the presence of such things—what new development of this conspiracy to confound me and increase my doubts of the truth of anything, do you think I have discovered! Why, I have just found out that the one I love is connected with these vultures.”

“This is, indeed, a strange affair,” said Mr. Graphic. “But how could you be so much deceived in the lady as not to discover on your first acquaintance that she belonged to a low-bred circle of bogus aristocrats?”

“Ah! I see I have been too hasty in giving you an idea that she is actually of the ilk of these people. This is not so. She has been brought up as chastely and purely as any in the land. But she is unfortunately connected with them by marriage. Her mother is the wife of Mr. Swellup, and that unprincipled snob is consequently her step-father.” Horace here related to his friend the circumstances from the beginning.

“While this is certainly most remarkable,” said Mr. Graphic, “I do not see how the lady whom you regard is in the least censurable in the matter. Nor can I see how your faith in her should be at all shaken. On the contrary, I should think your confidence in her should be infinitely greater, in view of the fact that she at first preferred you, who were poor, to those who were rich, but did not come up to her standard of morality; and that she still continues to do so while persecuted by her new connections because she will not receive the attentions of their kind.”

“Oh! I did not mean to say that she was to blame. The unfortunate circumstances are purely accidental; but the bitter fact still remains that she is connected with this clique of thieves. If they have not already corrupted her, there is reason to think they will in time. Her mother is the wife of the very chief of these plunderers, Mr. Swellup. It will not be strange if the mother should finally fall into the habit of thinking that the every-day practices of her husband and his friends must be right. That the mother will have great

influence with her daughter, who can doubt? How can I have any faith in any one who must, from the very nature of things, be brought under the influence of the Leech Club?"

"Alas! Horace, you have become so accustomed to doubting everything that you will make out a case of doubt where the majority of men would think they had the best proof in the world of plain truthfulness."

"The trouble is," replied Horace, "that everything has become so false and corrupt that the majority of men are obliged to accept as probably truthful, things which have a much greater appearance of equivocation than unimpaired veracity about them; otherwise they would have nothing but universally admitted falsehood to deal with. It may be better, like the bee, to extract what little honey of truth there may be in the immense herbage of falsehood. But I have been pursuing flowers that were tempting to the eye, and which appeared to be pregnant with nothing but honey, when, as I touched them to cull their seemingly dainty sweets, instead of yielding me a mellifluous treasure, they proved to be dripping with gall. If there is any property now in the rank growth of Dead Sea blossoms worth carrying to the hive, it unfortunately does not stick to my poor wings, and I fly from one unproductive field only to alight in another."

"The difficulty seems to be," said the other, "that you have formed in your own mind a certain standard of excellence, and all which does not come up to that, you discard as utterly worthless, and declare, in effect, that you will have nothing to do with it. Now just see what such a rule of action leads to. You are placed here in the world, and you have a part to perform. You can only act in concert with others. We are all each other's implements of action—tools if you please. Now you say these tools are not fit to work with; that they possess no true steel; that they are mere pewter, which turn awry as soon as struck into the stubborn soil. Very good; but they are the only ones you have, and to say that you will have nothing to do with them, is simply to say that you will remain idle."

"Would you," said Horace, "think of devoting your-

self to accomplishing good by acting in concert with such people as the inmates of the castle yonder? Why, you could only be tolerated in fellowship with them by engaging in most of the practices which render them infamous. For the purpose of doing a very little good, you would have to perform a much larger amount of evil. You cannot work with such tools without defiling yourself utterly."

"I did not mean to say," said Mr. Graphic, "that we should pick up any tools that might come to hand. But that we ought to be able to find some with which we may be able to delve, and accomplish something; that we might find a body of men with whom we might conscientiously act, and hold fellowship; that we might find some in whom we could put faith; that we might find some on whom we could rely as not all bad; and that we may give them our support, and receive theirs, in order to accomplish the various ends of life."

"I don't say it is impossible to do so," said Horace. "I only complain that I seem to be balked every time I make the attempt. I came here to the mountains hoping to get away for a short time, out of sight and hearing of the corruption that seems to have embraced in its serpentine coils all the business of life; and here I have fallen among a select society of corruptionists. Worse than that, I have only come here to discover that the one whom I had looked upon as being pure above all suspicion, is related to these freebooters—blamelessly, it may be, but still related in a manner that may in a short time make her an apologist for their remorseless acts.

"So it seems to be ever," continued Horace. "All good seems finally to merge into evil. Or rather, I doubt but it would be more proper to say that good appears to be only a modification of evil. Unmitigated evil seems to be the starting point, and every measure of good is only a little less of evil. We may suppose the sum of events to be a chain in which the links are the various grades of human beings joining hands. Evil is at the head, a powerful giant, a devil incarnate, and the next individual in the chain is only less bad. So on down the chain, and the one who is measurably good is

hanging on to the very tail end of the series, with a very uncertain hold, ready to be swung off at any time by the whirling of the catenation, with which he has so little affinity.

“We have an example of this right here. See how the good Charity Faithful is tagged on to this iniquitous Club. While in her nature, good greatly predominates, through the relationship her mother may be brought to apologize for the acts of her husband’s confreres—nay, she does already. The daughter may easily be persuaded to think as the mother does. Those who admire the daughter for her goodness of heart, may be insensibly drawn into regarding the things which she tacitly approves, as most probably right, or at least excusable. Thus does the larger amount of evil mingle with the smaller amount of good, vitiate and absorb it.

“Look which way you will, you see this verified. You see a few men who desire to labor for good; but they find themselves at the fag end of the chain, and tied up by their connections. Many of their friends, whose aid they need in their projects of reform; are connected in some way with evil-doers. Some may be involved in a relationship by blood with the knavish ones, while others are slightly and indirectly partakers of their acts or the fruits thereof. Thus he who would be a reformer, is balked as soon as he calls on his friends for aid. They become alarmed. They see that by the contemplated reformation, their friends, whose ways are crooked, would be brought to grief. Some who have only in an indirect way been involved in the wrong doing, begin to see that they will, in a measure, suffer with the more guilty. Thus the one who is burning for reform is checkmated on the start by the ties of *friendship*.

“FRIENDSHIP is responsible for the major portion of the unpunished vice in the country. Men default and embezzle the funds entrusted to their care, flattering themselves that their *friends* will save them from punishment. They take the lives of their fellow-men, depending on their *friends* to save them from the gallows. And the state of society is such that a man receives credit in the community for standing by a friend, though it be to protect him from the consequences of some diabolical deed, or the com

mission of some great official outrage against the commonwealth. And the man who turns his back on a *friend*, and leaves him to merited punishment for some gross act, is generally condemned for this exhibition of Spartan justice. So the administration of law has grown to be a commerce of *friendships*, or what is worse, a question of money.

"We never can have reform, so long as none but the *friendless* are punished. It is only for comparatively petty larceny that men are sent to the State prisons. The great thieves generally stand in the high places of the land. A man steals a railroad, or plunders the public treasury of millions of dollars, and you can no more punish him in the courts than you can call down the lightnings of Heaven to do your bidding. A man picks the pocket of a passenger on the cars of the stolen railroad, of a few dollars, and he is sent to the State prison for ten years. The thief who stole the railroad, and thus picked a hundred pockets, and who is picking the pockets of thousands of passengers every day by over-charges, in order that he may have money to defend himself in the courts against those whom he has defrauded, is spoken of as the Hon. Mr. So-and-So. The thief who pilfered the few dollars is only known as one making up the stated number of convicts, as given in the annual official reports.

"Thus the greater crimes, and infinitely the greater amount of robberies, are committed by those who are soon looked up to as among the most honored members of the community, and of whom there is scarcely a thought of punishing. Executors rob the heirs of estates; men take advantage of technicalities in the laws to fleece their neighbors; almost every one is endeavoring to fill his pockets at the expense of those around him. And so long as he can do this and not lay himself liable to conviction of any offense before the courts, or by the influence of his *friends* escape conviction, his crimes are soon forgotten; and if he has made money enough by his obliquity to be able to expend a considerable amount in public charities, and to be hospitable with his neighbors, he soon becomes an esteemed member of society. It would astonish you to investigate the affairs of any community, and find out how many of those

termed 'the solid men' have gotten their money by disreputable—nay, dishonest means. There is such a prestige attending the possession of wealth, and such a growing disposition to attain it by other than the slow process of honest labor, that men hazard their reputations on attempts to get it by a single grand *coup de main*, knowing that if they succeed their malfeasance will soon be forgotten, and they will shortly be admitted into the community of *gentlemen*; who dazzle the crowd in cities, and flourish at summer resorts during the exhausting hot weather; who, while they rejoice that they are no longer compelled to tax themselves with the less genteel employment of laboring for a living, still show that they have some regard left for those who are not so fortunate as they, by contributing to charitable purposes such crumbs as they can well spare from their stolen competency. While these successful criminals are thus reveling on the fat of the land, the poor, *friendless* thief, who has stolen a few dollars, in order that he may, as he thinks, enjoy himself; or has appropriated a suit of clothes to warm him, or bread to appease his hunger and that of his family—he is languishing and toiling in prison.

"I do not say that the respectable criminals who escape punishment, always continue to retrograde morally the same as those less fortunate thieves who get in limbo. The successful swindler, if he is shrewd, will cease his swindles, in a measure, after he has amassed a competency, and there being no longer any necessity for him to practice knavery for a living, he often becomes to all outward appearances, one of the most upright citizens of the community, and obtains a reputation as such. All reports of his previous obliquity are either forgotten or disbelieved. Perhaps you will say that, having repented of his evil-doings, and now adopted a useful course of life, he deserves forgiveness. But, to my notion, his case is precisely similar to that of the man who stole a sheep, and as he was carrying it away, his conscience troubled him, and he laid the sheep down, and prayed for forgiveness. Getting up from his knees, he shouldered the sheep, and walked on. Was he not the same sheep-thief that he was before, not having restored the animal to its pasture?

“Sometimes the successful criminal continues in his iniquitous course of robbery, but he manages to do just a sufficient amount of good to muddle the public mind into the belief that he is a high-toned gentleman, and that everything he does must be right, notwithstanding, to a superficial looker-on, it is apparently infamous. Ministers of the gospel, and heads of charitable institutions who have received the beneficiaries, when asked whether they think they are justified in accepting such, defend the munificent giver by, perhaps, saying: ‘That man’s life is a paradox. It may seem to you that he is highly culpable. But if you could see down into all the ramifications of his intricate affairs, you would discover that they are conducted on honest principles.’

“So the successful criminal, whether he continues in his nefarious practices or not, gets beyond the reach of the laws, and stands among the foremost men of the country. It would be the height of folly to attempt to bring him into the courts for an act that would consign the friendless criminal to penal labor for many years. Judges are but men, and they imbibe the delusion that permeates the whole community. They fall into the habit of regarding the successful swindler as a good and useful citizen. His nefarious acts become modified in the eyes of the courts into what is termed the necessary *finesse* of a business man; and he is so hedged about by the glamour of wealth and success that there is hardly a limit to the lengths to which he may go in setting the laws at defiance.

“The speculators on a smaller scale, who have no *friends* to aid them in dodging the statutes, become convicts, and as there is no longer any hope or ambition for them, they are apt to continue in the downward course of common crime. Though their first crimes may not have been anything like as bad as those of many more successful criminals who now fill high places, they have reached the lowest depths of degradation, and feel that nothing they can do can add to their disgrace. Therefore they are apt to continue in a course of *petty* crime—I say *petty* crime as compared to that of the large swindlers who escape and are honored for it—and these smaller criminals re-

main as outlaws to society. Such are the different fates of the large criminals and the small ones.

“So the man who engages in any of the leading affairs of life with the purpose of taking a high and honorable stand, finds the door shut against his advancement. If he desires to practice law, he soon sees that it is more the business of the lawyer to pervert the laws and prevent their execution, than to secure their honest enforcement. If he engages in mercantile and commercial affairs, he finds a system of business morals prevailing that sets him aghast. If he chooses the gospel ministry for a profession, he finds himself compelled to countenance among the members of his church, men who he knows ought rather to be clanking the chains of the convict, than passing the communion cup. And worst of all, if he desires to enter the political arena—the field so prolific with golden opportunities to the man of mind and culture—he finds the most open, shameless and systematic dishonesty that could be inaugurated in a Utopia of villainy, where all regulations were specially framed by robbers. The corruption of the age has permeated Church, State, and business circles, and made the whole subservient to its base ends.

“There seems to be no place left for a man who would like to thrive by unadulterated honesty; no place for a man who would like to triumph by his industry and acquirements—unless it be the industry of sleepless rascality, and the acquirements of the code of chicanery. The man who does not find pleasure in these things, has little source of enjoyment, and there does not seem to be much for him to do but to fold his arms, and look on, a single, lonesome spectator to the grand drama of knavery, in which the greater part of the world are the actors.”

Horace here concluded, and Mr. Graphic said:

“There is much of truth and much of over-coloring in what you say. I cannot believe that the whole machinery of society is quite so much out of gear; or that it is rather running backwards, as you intimate. If a man should act from your standpoint, he would literally do nothing, because by acting, he must join hands with those who engage in dishonest practices, and become, in

some measure, involved in their guilt. Is not this what your theory leads to?"

"I have simply been stating the case as I think it is in fact. I don't advise any one to draw from it strictly any of his rules of action. But I say this for myself: I think, were society so constituted that I could do so, I could find as much pleasure in rising in my profession by industry in mastering its principles, and not by giving my time to the study of chicanery—I could find as much pleasure in this as men do in heaping up ill-gotten wealth derived from robbing their neighbors and the public. But you see there is no chance for me or any one to rise thus in the profession of law, for the principal business of a lawyer now is to assist all sorts of tricksters in evading the laws. Now, for my part, while I do not mean to remain a drone and an idler, I will accept some humble and subordinate position, where I can earn my bread without being an instrument to aid systematic rascality."

"It appears to me," said Mr. Graphic, "that you will soon think better than to immure into obscurity talents and abilities such as yours. The recent, singular conspiracy of circumstances which you have encountered here, has had a depressing effect on your nervous system. But we will argue the subject no farther. I hear the echoes of the gong sounding for supper. Let us return to the castle."

CHAPTER XIII.

A WEDDING.

WE know that our lady readers will glance joyously at the heading of this chapter. A Wedding! How much is embraced in these two words. And when we say "embraced," we have no idea of making a pun. And why shouldn't the ladies, as well as the rest of mankind, be rejoiced at the prospect of a wedding? Despite the

affectation of crusty old bachelors and old maids to regard as weaknesses the ecstasies of young ladies in contemplation of a wedding, the hymeneal ceremony is the true beginning of manhood and womanhood. It is suggestive of many little felicities that are supposed to delight the female heart. The ladies attending a wedding will, of course, be adorned like newly-blown rose bushes, refreshed by a spring shower—a shower of approving smiles, for instance, from the exquisitely dressed beaux who are in attendance. And if, as women complain, men monopolize all the solid affairs of life, we don't see why the ladies should not enjoy the monopoly of shining forth pre-eminently on such interesting occasions as weddings. We were not created solely for the purpose of scratching ourselves on the thorns of life. It is a part of existence occasionally to bathe in ambrosia, and revel among flowers.

Weddings are certainly a very ancient institution. Adam had hardly gotten well established in the garden, when he and Eve were married. It is true that the ceremony was not attended with all the pomp and display of the present day, but it was doubtless just as interesting to them according to the light they had. Eve was not dressed in a splendid, trailing tarlatan robe, with flowing veil reaching to the ground; nor had Adam's tailor spent weeks in fitting him according to the latest fashions, with swallow-tailed coat, snowy vest, and pants fitting like the tights of a circus-rider. Nor were there a bevy of bridesmaids supporting Eve, and a corresponding number of groomsmen standing by Adam, as so many needed auxiliaries on a trying occasion.

There were several reasons why this first wedding did not take place *a la mode*, according to the more advanced ideas of the present day. In the first place, as to Eve wearing a trailing dress of exquisite gauze: the wedding took place in the open air in the garden, and had she worn such a dress, it would most probably have been torn into smithereens by catching on the shrubbery as she swept up to the altar. Then, even if she had been as regardless of the welfare of her trailing skirts as are some of her descendants of the present day, who sweep the streets gratis, there was no direct communica-

tion with the French manufacturers and Parisian dress-makers, and the procuring of such a toilet would have occasioned a long delay of the bridal ceremony; which was not to be thought of, seeing the immense amount of work that was before the young couple as soon as their honeymoon should be over, to take charge of an undeveloped farm, the limits of which were co-extensive with the earth, and not a single line fence built. As for Adam's wedding wardrobe, it was just as deficient as that of Eve, for similar causes. For though Adam is supposed to have become a very fair tailor in after years, and Eve a passable dress-maker, and both of them adepts in most of the mechanical trades pertaining to their sex, their artistic knowledge was not sufficiently developed at the time of their marriage to enable them to present themselves in attire to accord with more modern notions. It was not because they considered it un-aristocratic to make their own clothes that they failed to appear dressed in the height of fashion on their nuptial day—be it said to the shame of some of their descendants who affect to despise honest labor.

As to the absence of bridesmaids and groomsmen: this was owing in the first place to the fact that there were no young ladies and gentlemen in the vicinity, the same age of Adam and Eve, to act in that capacity. Then, it was not so necessary to have witnesses at that day to render the ceremony binding. Eve was not afraid that Adam would abscond with some other woman, nor was he afraid that she would elope with some designing libertine. Their confidence was not misplaced; for, though Eve did hearken to the seductive wiles of the serpent, she was never false to her marital vows; nor did Adam wander off, and flirt with the Darwinian daughters of the earth, who must have been quite numerous at that time in the adjoining countries.

But we have not cited this primitive wedding for the purpose of impressing its simplicity on our readers as an example to be followed at the present day; it would not be thought becoming for a bride and groom at the present time to appear at the altar dressed like Adam and Eve on their wedding day; on the contrary, our object is to show how gracefully Adam and Eve adapted

themselves to the spirit of the age, and to draw the inference that the brides and grooms of the present day may avail themselves of the better facilities afforded by the times. Manufacturers have exhausted their ingenuity to weave fabrics for female attire as dainty, almost as unsubstantial, as the gorgeous sunbeams that tip and fringe the garments of a cloud. Jewelers and lapidaries have taxed their capacities to plan devices wherewith to ornament the female form. To say that these fairy equipments shall not be worn, is almost equivalent to saying that the butterfly shall not appear in its gorgeous colors, the bird in its brilliant plumage, nor the fleeting mists of the morning reflect the golden hues of the rising sun. We don't care to take the responsibility of saying that the youth of both sexes may not shine with the resplendence that pleases them; only premising that they should not, in order to do so, discount gold-leaf hereafter to be battered by the hard toil of life; and bear in mind that there are other destinies for them to fulfill besides displaying the sheen of their resplendent butterfly wings.

The wedding, of which it is the especial object of this chapter to speak, took place in a fashionable church in a large city. The reader has already been made acquainted with the high contracting parties. If the young ladies like to contemplate an exquisite groom, a love of a man: one who appeared to have been kept generally in a band-box, and only let out for this especial occasion, then this one will please them. He was loaded down with finery and jewelry, for a man. Had there been any excuse whatever for him to wear a trailing robe and flowing veil, he would undoubtedly have done so.

And then his manners were so mincing and charming. His style of speaking was exquisite. He could mince words in a manner to put to shame the most spooney boarding-school miss that you ever saw. He was none of your blunt, countrified young men, who speak the English language out full and clear. There was that about his every word and act which stamped him as the distilled essence of city-bred, band-box aristocracy. Don't you love him, young ladies?

The bride, on the contrary, had evidently been educated in the country. Though dressed in the height of fashion, and garnished with jewelry, these decorations seemed as unsuitable to her as the wings of the butterfly to the staid cricket. And she did not have that mincing fluency of tongue, which is so fine an accomplishment of the pupils of Mrs. Fancylist's school. The groom was evidently, in almost every respect, much better qualified for acting the part of a bride, than was the one who had to perform that part on this occasion. It will always remain a mystery why the bride and groom did not, for the time, change places, seeing that it would not have made a very material difference in the recital of the marriage vows. The groom could have acted the part of the bride to perfection. The greater the amount of gorgeous attire that could have been gotten upon him, the happier he would have been. He would have rejoiced at the privilege of mincing his words like a highly educated young lady, instead of being tied down to the circumscribed limits of an aristocratic young man. And the bride would have done very well as a groom. She would have moved with much more grace and freedom in male attire than in the cumbersome bridal robes, the like of which she was entirely unaccustomed to. Furthermore, though her voice was not masculine, it would much sooner have passed as such in that refined society than that of the exquisite groom. But as no one thought of making such a happy, temporary exchange of situations, the ceremony had to proceed as best it could.

It is hardly necessary to inform the reader that the bride and groom of the occasion were Miss Mary Shoeman and Mr. Sindandy. There were six bridesmaids, all magnificently arrayed, and of course a similar number of groomsmen, on whose raiment all the niceties of the tailoring art had been exhausted; and the jewelry establishments of the city had evidently been ransacked to bedeck them with precious ornaments. We will not pester the reader with a chapter of "Jenkins" on the toilets of the ladies, or the superb outfits of the gentlemen; but leave these to be inferred from the general statement that nothing was wanting which money could purchase, or persist.

ent shopping discover, to present bride and groom, bridesmaids and groomsmen, and guests, in all the glory and splendor of the Leech Club.

Poor Mary Shoeman was ill at ease among her more accomplished companions—more accomplished, at least, in the art of spending money which had cost them no labor. Mary's father was rich, but his wealth had been the slow accumulation of industry and economy; and money thus won is not readily expended by its possessor for unnecessary things, no matter how much he may have of it. Mr. Shoeman rich, had not greatly changed the habits and mode of living from those of Mr. Shoeman in his poorer days, and Mary had hitherto had but little more finery than the daughters of those whose sole wealth was a small clearing, and who were often the employes of her father. But now that Mary was to contract such a splendid alliance, Mr. Shoeman had been persuaded to fit his daughter out with all the gorgeousness of her affianced husband's friends. He did not, however, thus part with his hard-earned dollars without some thought of getting them back with interest. He had been persuaded to go into the political arena at the next campaign, when he was assured that, with the countenance of the Leech Club, he should be successful, and would have the opportunity of reaping a rich harvest from the seed cast upon the waters.

The bridal party proceeded to the church in splendid carriages drawn by richly-caparisoned horses, driven by liveried coachmen and attended by liveried footmen. Royalty, itself, could scarcely surpass such splendor. Only a few of the bride's country friends were present. Miss Phebe Greenwood had been importuned to be present as one of the bridesmaids, with Mr. Flitaway as her attendant groomsmen, but she had positively rejected the proffered honor. That gallant had made no more progress in the good graces of Miss Greenwood since the imprisonment of John Woodman than before, though the suit of the city beau had been feebly favored by the parents of the young lady.

Everything went on auspiciously, and the ceremony commenced, by which the unsophisticated country girl was to be joined for life to the superb city swell. Silence

as profound as that of the secluded Catskills reigned through the glittering audience, the rustling of the silks corresponding to that of the forest leaves fanned by the passing breeze. The bridal party stood in imposing array at the altar. The officiating clergyman had proceeded as far in the ceremony as to pronounce the words:

"If any one has aught to say why these two should not be joined together in the holy bonds of wedlock, let him speak now, or hereafter hold his peace forever!"

A brief pause followed this enunciation, and the clergyman had opened his lips to proceed, when a strange figure arose in a far corner of the church. His dress, though respectable, was of antiquated pattern, his hair was straight and black, and his complexion was swarthy. Before he had uttered a word, Mr. Flitaway had caught sight of him, and his agitation was so great as to disturb the entire bridal party. Mr. Sindandy naturally had his attention drawn in the direction that his groomsman was looking, and seeing the strange figure, he, too, trembled visibly. The stranger was seen motioning to a young woman who sat near him, weeping. He was evidently trying to persuade her to make some sort of demonstration. Failing to do so, he at length exclaimed, in a deep, solemn voice:

"I forbid the consummation of this marriage, in the name of this young woman, who has been wickedly wronged by that man who now stands before the altar, and adds perjury to his other crimes. This woman who sits here is already his wife!"

As he paused, one of Miss Shoeman's male friends, who now had surveyed the stranger thoroughly, exclaimed:

"The Hermit of the Catskills!"

A shudder was visible among those of the company who were familiar with the Catskill regions, and had heard of this strange being. The young woman who had sat with her face covered, weeping, finally mustered courage to arise, when Miss Shoeman recognized her as one of her neighbors, and said, in a quick tone of surprise:

"Susan Clarkson!"

Mr. Sindandy's knees shook under him, and had he

not been supported by his groomsmen, he would have fallen to the floor. The bridal party became completely demoralized, and the ceremony which had been inaugurated with such pomp, and under such auspicious circumstances, seemed about to be broken up in the most ignominious manner by a poor country girl, whose fear that her shame might soon be exposed, overcame her timidity and drove her on to face her destroyer in his stronghold. But she reckoned without the host of myrmidons who there stood ready to do the bidding of the potent member of the Leech Club.

Mr. Sindandy soon regained his composure, and he pronounced the interference a conspiracy gotten up to annoy him. Summoning a policeman, who was only too glad to come at the beck and call of his patron, he gave the weeping girl into the charge of the officer. But he did not get rid of her without a scene. She clung to the sides of the pew, and smarting under her wrongs, she found her speech. She charged the splendid snob with the crime of bigamy, in tones of bitterness and reproach which must have rung in his ears long afterwards. She told him of his marriage vows, and his promise to make her a lady as grand as any who were then present. But he had regained his imperturbable, idiotic self-possession, and her words had no more effect on him than snow-flakes upon the salt sea.

"Mistah Policeman," said he, "you will do me a great favah to take her away from hea immediately. She is surely crazy."

The burly policeman loosened her hands from the pew, as if her grip was no more than that of a withered morning-glory vine to a lattice, and forced her mercilessly into the street. She was, however, followed by Mrs. Grandola, who wrote on a card the name of a street, and number of a dwelling, telling the officer to take her there instead of to the station-house. This kind lady spoke a few words of comfort to the poor girl, saying she had ordered her conducted to the house of a friend, where she would be well cared for. A carriage was called, into which the policeman urged his charge, and drove away.

Mr. Sindandy made many protestations of innocence. He scarcely knew this girl. He had just seen her in the

country while staying at the house of Mr. Shoeman. She had there pestered him with attentions, which he had discouraged. And now; under some hallucination, she had followed him to the city. The assemblage finally smoothed down their feathers like birds which have been ruffled by a rude and sudden hurricane, and the ceremony proceeded; this time without interruption. The Hermit of the Catskills had disappeared in the melee. How he came, and whither he went, no one knew.

As the party came forth from the church, the countenance of the bride wore an expression like that of one who had been attending the funeral of a dear friend, rather than of one who had just been united to the man of her choice. And there were others, also, whose spirits had been greatly affected by the untoward circumstance. Altogether, it was any thing but a joyous bridal party which got into the splendid carriages, and were driven away.

We will follow Susan Clarkson to the quarters to which Mrs. Grandola had so kindly sent her, instead of allowing her to be consigned to the station-house. It was on a genteel street. The house wore a neat appearance without, and was elegantly furnished within. As the policeman who accompanied Susan, rang the bell, a respectable-looking female came to the door, and apparently recognized the officer. It is wonderful, the ramifications of the Leech Club. At the church, Mr. Sindandy had only to step to the door, whistle, and this policeman was on hand in a moment, at once recognizing a superior in the man who whistled him. Then Mrs. Grandola intervenes to save the poor girl from the station-house, gives the policeman an address in a distant street, and behold the officer is recognized there also.

As Susan was ushered into the elegant apartments of this mansion, she was kindly greeted by a number of young women of ladylike appearance. They assured her that she would find a home and friends there, till such times as she could obtain a permanent abiding place. How much better this than going to the station-house.

After Susan had enjoyed the hospitalities of this house a day or two, she observed that the young ladies of the house received frequent calls from very fine gentlemen.

She was introduced to some of these young men, and they also became quite attentive to her. Under the circumstances, however, she did not feel like encouraging these kindnesses. She was drooping under a corroding grief, and would have been glad to hide entirely from all society.

It was not long before she had a confidential conversation with the mistress of the house, to whom she told her troubles. It was the old story of woman's credulity and man's treachery.

The lady said she would find means to relieve Susan of the responsibility she dreaded; that the world need never know aught to her detriment; and that she might yet be as respected, and as much thought of as the sprightly young ladies who were her companions in the house. How good of Mrs. Grandola to send her there. That lady knew the mistress of the house to have an especial kindly feeling for young women who had been thus unfortunate, and she had before sent such there, knowing that they would receive protection and sympathy.

And now it was the turn of the mistress of the house to give Susan some confidential information. Some of those very young ladies whom she saw daily in the house had been similarly unfortunate. They had there sought an asylum in their troubles, and ever afterward they retained so much gratitude and affection for their benefactress that they preferred to remain with her. The duties which she required of them were not onerous. The mistress had an extensive circle of acquaintances—many gentlemen friends—and all she required of the young ladies of her establishment was to entertain these in a ladylike manner. Good, philanthropic soul!

CHAPTER XIV.

JOHN WOODMAN RECEIVES A MYSTERIOUS COMMUNICATION.

WHILE there are many more than rogues enough to fill all the prisons, could they only be caught and convicted, it would seem that things are very badly ordered that an

innocent man should be doomed to confinement. But, as things had become so reversed that the rogues were the administrators of law, it was not strange that they should enact a sort of poetical justice, as regards their community, and consign the innocent to prison, in order to give the latter an adequate idea of the situation. It quite frequently happens that an insane person, who is being conveyed to the asylum, turns the tables on the officer who has him in charge, by abstracting the commitment papers, and, representing the officer as the demented individual, effects his incarceration in the hospital, while the real lunatic goes about his business. And the shrewdness manifested by the lunatic under such circumstances is so remarkable as to create a doubt among mankind whether there is any difference between sanity and insanity, or rather, whether those called lunatics are not actually the most sane ; and consequently, whether the reversing of situations, and the confinement of the so-called sane man in the asylum, is not a fair and legitimate exchange.

Many regard all sorts of moral aberration and all great criminality as a species of insanity. Taking this view of the case, the moral lunatics, at the time of these events, had gotten control of matters, and the less shrewd reputed-sane people were receiving the treatment heretofore accorded to the criminals who were now their masters. Such was the apparent, abnormal state of society.

John Woodman, then, may be regarded as one of whom a moral lunatic had gotten the best of, and placed in durance vile. As the sane man is supposed to have a keener appreciation of the odium of confinement in a lunatic asylum, so the man guiltless of crime may be thought to feel more bitterly the galling yoke of penal servitude than the real criminal. John toiled drearily, almost hopelessly, on his island prison ; sometimes almost ready to drop down and expire with a broken heart. Perhaps the only thing that sustained him was the fact that his days were spent in the open air in the quarry, where he could commune with nature, entirely oblivious to the presence of his criminal companions.

John had put in some weeks in this galling situation ;

it cannot be said that he lived. The most that can be said is that the Lord had not yet suffered him to die. Doubtless there were other destinies yet for him to fulfill. The dreary waves, as they broke against the sea-wall, seemed constantly to chant the requiem of his reputation, and to tell him how much better was the fate of those whose early dreams of ambition had stopped short of fulfillment at the threshold of the grave.

John was at work near the water, in full sight of passing boats and skiffs, when a most remarkable and mysterious circumstance occurred. He was a little apart from his gang, working with a crowbar, when there dropped down not more than three feet in front of him an arrow. It seemed to come from the clouds. Picking it up, he observed a piece of paper tied to the stem. Instinctively he tore off the paper, and concealed it in his clothing. The arrow consisted of a stone head, such as the Indians use, and the frailest kind of a wooden stem. The stem he crushed to splinters, so that its remains could attract no attention, as they were strewn among the fragments of rock. As John's motions were observed by the keeper, the latter stepped up to see what was the matter. John presented the stone arrow-head which he had found. As such relics of the aborigines are frequently dug up, the keeper accepted this as an explanation of John's pausing in his work. Taking the arrow-head, the keeper said he would retain it to deposit in the museum in the city.

The time seemed long to John, ere he could retire to his cell, and see what was in the paper which had come to him so mysteriously. He hardly dared to hope for any amelioration of his circumstances, but somehow the thought took possession of him that the paper contained tidings that would gladden his heart. For the first time he was anxious to be locked up in his cell when the day's work was done. Drawing from his bosom the little billet of paper, he found folded in it a small oil-cloth bag, and a small file. On the paper he read :

"Can you manage on any night not far distant, to get out of your cell, and repair to the sea-wall near where you picked up the arrow? Write on the back of this paper what you can do put it in the oil-cloth bag, tie it

up tight, fasten a stone to it, and throw it over the sea-wall where you found the arrow, to-morrow."

John read this with amazement. Where could it have come from? Had he friends in the clouds to drop him such a message? Or did it come from some friend sailing upon the neighboring water? He had seen no vessel near at the time the arrow fell. There were boats and skiffs afar off, but he thought not near enough to send such a missile in a circuit through the sky so that it could fall at his feet. He had at first almost a mind to attribute it to supernatural agencies, concerning which a belief had lately grown up in his native Catskill region, through the strange manifestations that had lately been developed there. But he soon dismissed this thought, or at least concluded that human agency must have had something to do with the matter, even though spirits might have been instrumental in conveying him the message. For there were palpable articles—paper, oil-cloth, a file. He had material philosophy enough about him to scout the idea of spirits forging the file, even though they might have access to the innermost caves of the Catskills, and the minerals in the bowels of the mountains.

But he did not waste much time in useless conjecture as to the origin of the message. It was plain that it came from some one who sought to relieve him from his terrible situation. The few weeks' confinement, the unwholesome diet, and the corroding chagrin consequent upon the thought that his reputation had been suddenly blasted for naught, had told so terribly upon his naturally strong frame that it was doubtful if he could live to the end of his sentence. His only hope was to free himself from this living death as soon as possible.

He soon began to look about his cell, to see what facilities there were of escape. The survey was soon made, for there was not much ground to go over. His abiding place was no more than a small closet. The only method of egress was through an iron door, the hinges and lock of which he could not reach with his file. Even could he get this door open, he would only be in a narrow hall, from which there was no way of escape. His cell was in a part of the building which had apparently once been

used for some other purpose, and the window through the outer wall was consequently a little larger than those in ordinary cells. But this window was protected by a large bar of tempered steel through the center, and it would be useless to attack this with a tiny file. John sat down on his cot in despair!

He remained for some time with his face covered in his hands. When he again looked up, his eyes were fixed on the narrow window. He thought if he could only remove that merciless steel bar, he would be able to squeeze himself through the aperture. He examined the file. It was a small, slim instrument, rather like a diminutive saw than a file. It had two edges. John thought it was an admirably contrived instrument, and he concluded that, after all had retired in the prison, he would try its temper on the large steel bar. He called to mind the fable of the mouse that gnawed asunder the thongs into which the lion had been entrapped, and set the king of beasts free. Why might not this little file, or saw, be his friendly mouse? "Despise not the day of small things!"

It was midnight before John ventured to draw the file across the bar which stood between him and liberty. The bar itself was almost as hard as an ordinary file, and it literally seemed to laugh in creaking derision as John tickled it with his tiny saw. As much as to say: "Well, young man, if that sort of thing amuses you, keep doing so. It don't hurt me any. In fact I am rather amused with it. I have been itching for some one to scratch me down there this good while. The only fault I find is that you scratch so lightly that I can scarcely feel your nails. Can't you lay on a little harder? I want such a tickling as will make me laugh outright. Nonsense! I shall not be able even to smile if you can't tickle me any harder than that. I wonder if it is anything more than a few small gnats that are biting me? The foolish things! Do they think they can draw blood out of a steel bar? Ha! ha! ha!"

Though John did not make much impression on the bar, he found that his little instrument was admirably tempered, and at least did not turn awry at the contact. The trouble seemed to be to establish a sticking place—

a crease that would keep the little saw from glancing over the surface of the bar. He placed a little chip of wood firmly against the side of the bar, and let the saw follow along the chip, so as to keep it from glancing about. He pursued this course for some time, and feeling of the bar, had the satisfaction to detect the smallest indication of a crease. He worked in total darkness, and had to go entirely by the sense of feeling. He was encouraged, and proceeded with unflagging energy. In about an hour more the little viper of a file had an unmistakable hold into the bar, and could keep its track without the aid of the chip of wood at its side. In another hour it was sunken its entire width into the arrogant steel, and the bar no longer gave back a mocking laugh. In fact it rather began to beg, and to assume a deprecating tone, as much as to say :

"There, that will do. You have tickled me long enough. It is getting late, and is time we were both asleep. Thank you, you need not scratch me any more. I have not got the itch. There was only a little rust down there that I wanted scratched off. If you keep on, you will scratch through my skin, and then I will break your feather in pieces. Come, come, a joke is a joke, but this is getting serious!"

But the venomous little saw kept gnawing away like a canker-worm, and as it passively withstood the scoffs of the bar, so it was now heedless of its pleadings. It was approaching the heart of its victim, and the latter no longer even protested in vigorous tones, but rather seemed to gasp: "Stop, you will run that needle into my vitals, and open an artery that may bleed me to death." Soon the persistent little file will bring down the once arrogant bar as the weasel did the hawk which carried it up into the air thinking to make a meal of it.

John was astonished at his success. By three o'clock in the morning he was half through the bar, when he desisted, for fear of attracting attention from the officers of the prison. He calculated from the progress made that he could sever both ends of the bar in two nights more. He accordingly wrote on the paper that he would be ready on the first dark night succeeding the second from that date. He cautioned his unknown friend not to come

for him till they were favored with a pitch-dark night. He gave directions to signal him with a light from the water on a certain side of the prison, where he could see it from his cell. He then placed the paper in the oil-cloth bag. After filling the crease in the partially severed bar with dampened dust, he lay down for a short sleep.

John found no difficulty during the day in attaching a pebble to the oil-cloth bag, and throwing it over the sea-wall, unobserved. He saw that the water there was shallow at low tide, and that the bag might easily be found, even in the night, by any one looking for it carefully, with the aid, perhaps, of a dark-lantern, which would not be observed under the wall.

John had not miscalculated the time that would be necessary to remove the obstructing bar from the window of his cell. Lying down and resting on each evening till nearly midnight, he afterward plied his instrument so industriously that in two nights more he had the bar as nearly severed as he dared. A few minutes more with the file, and he could snap it off with a pull. Carefully concealing his work, he now waited for a dark night when he expected to see a signal light on the water.

On the third evening after he had gotten the steel bar at his mercy, the skies became overclouded. It was not pitch-dark, but the obscurity was such as might serve the purpose. John would rather have had a darker night, but he thought it best to watch for the signal. After it had become quite late in the evening, he remained for most of the time with his face at the window. It was past midnight when he saw a ray of light dart over the water and immediately disappear. He waited for a minute or two, then he saw a light arise suddenly as from the surface of the water five or six feet into the air. Three times this was repeated in quick succession, and the light was no longer seen. In about three minutes this signal was repeated. John no longer doubted that the signal was meant for him. He appeared to be endued with new strength. Grasping the bar, he snapped it off like a reed. It was with the utmost difficulty that he squeezed through the narrow window. Fortunately the window was not more than twelve feet from the ground, and

hanging on by his hands, he let himself down, so that he had not more than six feet to drop, and he received no injury. He had retained the steel bar, which he thought might serve for a weapon in case of an emergency.

Crouching close to the ground, he crept along toward the spot where he expected to find a boat to deliver him from captivity. He descried through the murky night guards walking to and fro on their rounds. When the face of a guard was toward him, he lay close to the ground. At length he reached the sea-wall where he had picked up the mysterious message. A short distance from this stood a sentry. But there was no retreat, and he crept on to the very brink of the wall. At this instant the face of the guard was turned toward him, and he heard the challenge:

“Who goes there?”

John was evidently discovered, and his only alternative was to drop some ten or twelve feet from the wall upon the beach. The sentry heard the splash, and fired his musket, giving the alarm. Sentry answered to sentry, and soon the whole guard were on the alert. The sentry who had most probably seen John drop from the wall did not venture to follow, and it would not have been safe for him to do so. But John found no friendly boat to meet him as he had expected. It was low water, the beach was partially bare, and John sat down close under the wall to escape observation. As he heard the clatter of preparation among the prison guard, his heart sank within him. Had he been lured on to this attempt to escape by some false and evil spirit, who now left him to be ignominiously captured, and to have his punishments multiplied?

Pretty soon he heard a splashing in the water along the base of the sea-wall, at some distance off. John thought at first that some of the guards had descended, and were approaching him in that direction. Whatever it was approaching, evidently had to swim at times, for occasionally the water was deep, then again a narrow strip of dry beach would be found at the foot of the wall. As the splashing came nearer, he heard an occasional growl, and he comprehended the situation. They had let loose a bloodhound to seek him! How lucky

that he had brought that steel bar! But he had a dangerous enemy to contend with. Should he fail to hit the animal with his weapon at the first dash, his own doom was sealed.

A short distance from where John sat, the deep water came close up to the wall. This the dog would have to swim before reaching him. Here John determined to meet his foe, and strike him while he was in the water. Repairing to the spot, he saw the dog plunge in on the other side. The savage brute saw, and seemed to rejoice that his prey was so near. John waded out so as to meet him ere he got his foot upon the land. As the furious beast drew near, John dealt him a blow upon the fore shoulder, which caused him to rend the air with his howls. The blow was intended for his head, but the dog had sprung forward as the steel bar came down. The beast was disabled but not killed. The dog gaining a foothold upon the sand, John was obliged to spring into the water to escape his fangs. The brute followed, but the disabling blow that he had received upon the shoulders was a serious detriment to his motions. John was now able to deal him a blow upon the head, which stunned him. The blows now fell upon him thick and fast, the life was beaten out of his savage body, and his carcass was washed ashore upon the beach.

A shout from the guards told John that they had heard the howls of the dog, and that they consequently knew where the fugitive prisoner was. But no guard seemed disposed to drop down from the top of the wall, doubtless fearing they might meet the evident fate of the dog.

John now heard a boat putting out from the landing place, which was some distance around the island; and as there was no apparent succor for him, he gave himself up for lost. Thud, thud, thud, he heard the vigorous working of the oars in the tholes, sounding the knell of his liberty. Just as the prow of the hostile boat rounded the jutting portion of the wall near by, he saw a flash of light on the water in front of him. Then he heard the splashing of oars in that direction. He could see the boat of the guards by the light which it carried, but that

which he supposed was the friendly boat was obscured by the darkness. Both, as nearly as he could judge by the sound, were about equally distant. The guard boat was not long in coming up, but as John lay close to the sand against the wall, the guards did not see him, and went by. As they got a few lengths by, a skiff with a single oarsman dashed in where John lay, and in a twinkling he was on board the rescuing boat. The prow was turned about, and they were dashing away for liberty. The guards soon discovered this maneuver and turned their boat in pursuit. But their heavy boat was no match in speed for the light skiff. Seeing their prisoner escaping them, they dropped their oars, and sent a volley of bullets after the fugitive skiff, but without the least effect. They commenced again the pursuit, firing muskets, and spreading the alarm as much as possible. And now a new danger sprang up ahead. A vessel lying at anchor sent out a couple of small boats, and thus headed off the flying skiff. They were now obliged to make for the shore. They reached the land where there was a boat lying near a small clump of bushes. The strange oarsman urged John ashore, and then lifted the light skiff from the water as if it had been a feather. Placing the boat on his shoulder, he told John to bring the oars, and follow. They pushed forward in the bushes along the shore. The pursuers soon came up, and seeing a boat lie there, supposed that it was the one abandoned by the fugitives, who had, probably, taken to the country. The guard accordingly started out in pursuit, some up the shore, some down the shore, and some out into the country. The fugitives, after carrying their skiff a short distance, again put it into the water, and glided silently away. It was not till it was too late for further pursuit that the guards found out how they had been fooled.

The strange boatman having gotten clear of all pursuit, plied his oars vigorously, keeping on till nearly break of day. He then landed at the foot of a high, wooded bluff. Taking the boat from the water, he carefully concealed it in a little gully, thickly covered with evergreens. He then motioned John to follow him higher up the bluff. They soon reached a most secluded

spot—a gully surrounded by a thick growth of trees and underbrush, with a spring of water flowing from the side of the mountain. As the two voyagers sat down, they observed that day was breaking in the east. John naturally felt an inclination to know something about his benefactor; as soon as he had somewhat regained his composure he said:

“My good and kind friend, to whom am I indebted for this happy liberation? and how is it that an entire stranger should have run such great risks to render such unspeakable service to one who is no more to him than the hundreds whom he meets every day?”

“As to who I am, and what are my motives,” said the stranger, “it matters little. Men call me the Hermit of the Catskills. This is all the information I can give you at present.”

At the mention of that dread name, John shuddered. There he sat alone in the dim twilight of the morning with that mysterious being, whose name had become the terror of the Catskill region—not from any harm that he had been known to do, but for the reason that there was an opinion extant that he was connected with supernatural powers. The Hermit observed John’s evident awe, and immediately said:

“Whatever I am, you must nevertheless feel that I am your friend, for I could not possibly have any object but friendship in rescuing you from the pestiferous scoundrels who kidnapped you.”

“Truly, most magnanimous man,” said John, “I would be utterly unworthy such labor as yours, should I regard you in any other light than a benefactor.”

“No, regard me not so,” said the stranger. “There is a God above that orders all our actions, and to Him only, you are indebted for all the good you have. Whatever we do, is simply as the instruments of an overruling power.”

“But tell me,” said John, “how you knew of my imprisonment, and how you discovered me among a gang of men, all looking much alike in dress and general appearance? How could you distinguish me whom you never knew, and manage to drop me a message in such a miraculous manner?”

"I cannot satisfactorily answer all these questions. You forget that I might have seen you a hundred times in the Catskills, and that I might have approached quite near enough in a boat to distinguish you on your island prison."

"Ah! my dear, good friend, I will question you no more. For this I have learned, first from hearsay, and now by experience, that the more one tries to fathom you, the farther he is drawn into mystery."

When the day broke, the Hermit proceeded a short distance up the gully, in the side of which he raised a thin slab of stone, which to all outward appearance had been placed there by the hand of Nature. A small receptacle was revealed, from which he drew forth a wooden box, well stored with provisions. It was evident that he had made ample preparations for a base of supplies, as well as a line of retreat, before embarking in his perilous enterprise. After both had appeased their hunger, the Hermit took from a compartment in the box, a new suit of clothes, which he told John to exchange for his prison garb. John proceeded to do this with all satisfaction and expedition, and was about to pour forth anew his gratitude to the stranger, when the countenance of the latter told him that further thanks would not be relished, and he desisted. The habiliments of the prison were buried in a cavity in the ground, and nothing was left to indicate that an escaped prisoner had been in the vicinity. John could now walk forth the same as any other citizen without being questioned.

"Now," said the Hermit, "we can rest securely here all day. You need repose before embarking on the journey which is before you. I would advise you not to return to the Catskills, for the villains who planned your imprisonment are getting the entire control of things there. I question whether any one who stands in the way of their designs will long be safe in the neighborhood."

"Do you mean to say," said John, "that any member of the Leech Club had aught to do with getting me into prison?"

"Without doubt, they did."

John began to reflect that he had been persuaded to

go to the city by a stranger, who, now that he thought of it, was very likely connected with the Club. The idea rushed into his mind that Mr. Flitaway might have thought him in the way of his designs in regard to Phebe Greenwood.

"Then," said John, "I shall return to my native hills, and see if these vampires can practice their infernal vocation with the same impunity in the country that they do in the city. I guess our own county courts will have something to say when they try to kidnap men and put them out of the way illegally."

"Don't tempt your fate thus just now," said the Hermit. "Recollect that they already have you under the conviction of *their law*. And they have so infused themselves into all the powers of the State as to render themselves potent even in the rural districts. There might be some chance for you, if you were to be tried by a jury of your own townsmen. But they were wise enough to have you convicted by a court which they owned. Now, no trial is necessary. They have only to capture you as an escaped convict. If you value your liberty, keep out of their clutches till the day of their discomfiture comes. It cannot be far distant, for such a conclave of thieves cannot long govern a great State."

"Indeed, has it come to this," said John, with a groan, "that the gilded scum can rule the State and hunt honest men like wild beasts from their homes? Then I propose to repair to my native valleys and try conclusions with them! In twenty-four hours I can have together a company of riflemen who will chase those tinselled snobs like frightened foxes from the mountains, and topple their castle down about their ears!"

"Softly, softly, young man. Don't you know that you would be considered as a rebel against the State authorities? The wrong perpetrated by the Leech Club is done under color of the law, and so long as they have all the machinery of the law in their own hands, open resistance would be madness. Should you call your friends to your aid, and get a force which the civil officers could not overcome, a regiment of militia would be called out in your own county to quell the disturbance. You would not only subject yourself to extreme punish-

ment, but would get your friends into serious trouble."

"You may be right, but it is passing strange that a clan of thieves should have such power."

"A little strange, truly, but easily understood when you take into consideration that these thieves are at present the ruling power of the State. Take my advice and depart out of this State for the present. Obtain some humble employment that will support you, and enable you to contribute something to your mother."

As the shades of evening set in, the Hermit signified to John that it was time to depart. He accompanied John to the nearest highway, and gave him directions to a neighboring village, where he could embark on railroad cars. He then handed John a roll of paper and said:

"Here we part."

Before John could seize the hand of his benefactor to bid him adieu, he had darted back into the forest. Unfolding the paper, John found a roll of bank bills, amply sufficient for his present wants. A feeling of oppressive sadness came over him at parting thus with his disinterested friend, and he was more than ever puzzled with the mystery that surrounded the Hermit of the Catskills. John had a walk of about four miles before reaching the village, whence he soon departed on an evening train of cars.

CHAPTER XV.

HORACE LACKFATHE'S OPINIONS OF MANKIND REMAIN UN-
CHANGED.

THERE was no such thing as satiating the Leech Club either with wealth or power. They reached out from the government of the City to that of the State, and now they were grasping at the National Government. They allowed no opportunity to slip either to increase their pecuniary or political aggrandizement. Thus Mr. Sindandy had managed to form an alliance with the rich tanner's

daughter, Miss Shoeman; and Mr. Flitaway was trying the same enterprise with Miss Greenwood, with little prospect of success, however. By this means they hoped to extend their political as well as their pecuniary power. Mr. Swellup had married a wealthy widow. Her daughter, Charity Faithful, had a large property in her own right, and Mr. Swellup was kindly anxious to see her married to a retainer of the Leech Club. It was natural that she should confide to Horace Lackfathe the story of the persecutions she suffered in this respect. She could only confer with him at stolen interviews; for had her intimacy with Horace been known, the latter would instantly have been banished from the castle. A combination of circumstances, of which the arrival of Charity was the chief, still kept Horace at the Club House, where he had the nominal position of a teacher, with very little, however, to do. One day, when he had appointed a meeting with Charity in the woods, he came inadvertently upon her in conversation with Mr. Swellup, who had met her by accident, and took that opportunity to press the suit of his friend. Horace was obliged to take refuge behind a rock, to escape observation, and was thus an involuntary listener to their conversation.

"Well, Charity," said Mr. Swellup, "I hope you have by this time concluded to marry Mr. Sleezy Silkstockings. I must have an answer now!"

"I thought," said Charity mildly, "I had given you my answer long ago."

"Oh! yes," said Mr. Swellup in a great passion, "you said *no*, but I will take no such answer as that. I must have *yes*, and have it now, or it will be the worse for you!"

"That you can never have," said Charity with as much passion as it was in her mild nature to throw into her speech. "That you never can have. Life itself would be worth nothing to me as the wife of that man, and I will part with life sooner than to marry him!"

"Oh! that is all very fine. But do you know," hissed Mr. Swellup, "that I can place you where your life will be a greater burden than you conceive it would be as the wife of this man whom you affect to despise? There is a fearful cave in these mountains where I can imprison

you; where demons will be your companions, and hideous noises and sights the terror of your nights and days. Come, I would have your answer!"

Charity shuddered, but immediately replied:

"Even that would not make things much worse, for demons are my companions now. I am at your mercy. Take what advantage you choose of a defenseless woman."

Mr. Swellup strutted furiously away, hissing vengeance like an enraged serpent, leaving Charity clinging to a tree for support. As soon as her persecutor was out of sight, Horace rushed forth from his hiding place, and clasped her in his arms.

"Ah!" said he, "I could hardly refrain from rushing forth and throttling that villain on the spot. I know the cave he would imprison you in. The terrors of hell itself are no comparison to it. Fly, Charity, fly! Let me take you to a place where you will be safe from the designs of that scoundrel!"

"I would gladly do so, Horace, but I must also manage to get my mother out of the power of these terrible people. Should I escape alone, she will be blamed for instigating my flight, and there will be no end to the persecutions she will suffer. I cannot leave her."

"We will get her, also, and depart this very night, after all are in bed."

"It is not so easy to get away as you think for. The only trail which leads from the castle is carefully guarded. It would be impossible for a feeble woman like my mother to make her way in the night through the trackless mountains. We shall have to try to get away by management, without exciting a suspicion that we intend to leave for good."

"But, they dare not stop us. They have no right to block the way of peaceable travelers. I would shoot the man as a highway robber who should presume to hinder me from going at large."

"You should know that the Leech Club have no law but their own inclinations. And as for shooting those who might stop us, that would do very well if there were only two or three unarmed men in the way. But here the odds are too greatly against us."

"But, do you think, Charity, they would dare attempt to hold us here as prisoners in defiance of the laws of the State?"

"Mr. Swellup tells me," said Charity, "that the laws of the State are all in their own hands. He says that they control the Legislature and the courts, and that they can have any decisions they please. I fear he tells me too truly. I fear that even in the neighboring rural courts they would manage to have things all their own way. I believe they might commit the greatest outrages right here, and if complained of, they would manage so to mystify the courts, by their splendor and their connection with the high authorities, that any evidence that could be brought against them would be disbelieved, and they would come out with flying colors."

On reflection, Horace could not gainsay this; and he began to speculate upon some method of escaping according to Charity's suggestion, of getting out of reach of the castle without exciting the suspicion that they were going for good. Charity departed for the castle, and Horace sought counsel from his friend, Mr. Graphic. He soon found the latter seated in a favorite bower, and informed him of the new developments. After Mr. Graphic had heard the statement, he said:

"I have thought of a very simple and feasible solution of this difficulty. Make arrangements for a clergyman to visit this vicinity without the knowledge of any of the Leech Club. Tell the minister the story in a straightforward manner. Get Charity Faithful to meet you out on the grounds, with me for a witness, and let the clergyman unite you and the persecuted lady in wedlock. As you have been long engaged, there will be no impropriety in it, and from what I have seen, I have no doubt that she will consent. There will then no longer be an opportunity for Mr. Swellup to keep up his persecution in order to compel her to marry the man she despises; you will then have a husband's right to protect her; and there will be no great difficulty to get her away from here. Her mother can easily find an excuse to visit the city, and then you will all be free from the grasp of these freebooters."

Horace's head fairly swam with doubt and perplexity

at the recitation of this plan. Its feasibility he did not doubt, but it involved something to be done on his part that he was far from being prepared for.

"Oh! for heaven's sake, talk no more of that," said Horace; "it is impossible!"

"How impossible?"

"My faith in humanity is so depreciated that I could not bring myself to unite my destinies inseparably with any woman just now. I would only increase my own misery by having constantly with me a new subject for doubt; and could not do justice to her by placing in her that trust which a wife would have a right to expect, and without which she would be more miserable than she is in her present situation. I cannot do her such wrong."

"But you do not mean to say that you suspect that Charity has been corrupted by contact with the Leech Club? Surely she has given evidence that she abhors these people as thoroughly as you do."

"No, I do not say that I suspect her of being tainted in that manner. I simply have not faith enough in any of the race to marry. Not now!"

"But, are you playing falsely with her feelings; giving her to understand that you regard her with tenderness, while you do not intend to fulfill your engagement with her?"

"Oh! no; for God's sake don't accuse me of that. The engagement was made under different circumstances—when I supposed she was poor like myself, and while I regarded everything as pure as I now see all things corrupt. While I cannot turn from and forsake her in such an extremity as this, I cannot do both her and myself the wrong of rushing headlong into the consummation of vows, to which, while my heart might respond, my head and faith would give the lie. But I am not playing false with her. I love her truly; and if time should sufficiently blunt the keen doubts that now disturb me, and her views toward me should remain unchanged, I shall fulfill the engagement. Unless this change should take place, I would certainly do her a greater injustice by giving her a hand, and even a heart, without faith, than to leave her free, and aid her by all other means in my power."

"But what do you doubt about her? What is there to doubt?"

"No more, perhaps, than I should find in any woman that could be produced. You do not fully comprehend me. My faith in all women, men and things has been so much shaken by recent events that I could not bring myself up to the issue of taking an irrevocable step which would bind me to anything forever. I must wait till my sensibilities become blunted, or till my mind grows out of this snarl."

"But are you not doing Charity a wrong by keeping her in the dark respecting your feelings? Ought you to allow her to continue in the belief that you still stand to your engagement with her? Ought you not to inform her that she is free from an engagement which you are not disposed to fulfill?"

"I cannot see my way clear to do that now. She has trouble enough on her hands, and I would be a brute to add to it. She seems to regard, and trust in me. She knows that I love her, and she has no means of knowing that my faith and heart cannot go together in scarcely anything. It would, perhaps, be an overwhelming sorrow, should I, under present circumstances, describe to her the state of my mind. I must first get her clear from this den; then, if necessary, I can unfold to her my feelings, even if—if it breaks my own heart to give her up."

"Only think," said Mr. Graphic, "how finely you might be situated if you chose. She has ample wealth, and Mr. Longterm, the Congressman, informs me that you have every ability to rise to the highest position known to your profession."

"I have," said Horace, "given you some inkling of my views in that direction. For one to rise in the profession of law, is to become debased as to every moral principle."

"And Mr. Longterm tells me," said Mr. Graphic, "that should you pursue the practice of your profession, you would stand an excellent chance to rise in the political world."

"Say I might soon become an eminent citizen by turning thief and robber," said Horace.

"But, Horace, your treatment of Charity Faithful is most cruel. While you are engaged, and she has no idea

but you stand true to the engagement, you are in doubt whether you will ever consummate it or not. I almost feel that it is my duty to enlighten her on the situation of affairs."

"Good heavens! Mr. Graphic," said Horace with wild vehemence, "that would be kind of a friend! You would add to my already sufficient weight of sorrows the remorse of breaking the heart of an unprotected woman in her extremity! I am ready to lay down my life to protect her, if necessary; but why should I hurry on an alliance that would be but the consummation of a fraud on my part. Is it not with a view not to add to her present troubles that I do not declare to her the state of my feelings? And time may soon wear away this feeling of doubt, and I may be able finally conscientiously to consummate the engagement, and she may never know of the cruel doubts that have racked my poor brain."

"Ah!" said Mr. Graphic, "I see I have done you wrong. But one must study, ere he can comprehend you. How faithless, and yet how trustworthy! How false, and yet how true!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A NEW MEMBER OF THE LEECH CLUB TRIES HIS HAND AT THEIR GAME.

MR. SHOEMAN bore the reputation among his neighbors of a rather close-fisted, though honest man. He was striking out in an entirely new line, when he consented to the marriage of his daughter with Mr. Sindandy, and listened to the golden tales of aggrandizement that were poured into his ears by the Leech Club. It is astonishing that a man of his business tact did not see through the thin gauze which covered, or rather failed to cover, the rascality of his new friends. For a man who, commencing poor, had amassed a large fortune in the tanning

business, must have possessed considerable shrewdness. And as his honesty was unquestioned, it appears almost incomprehensible that he should have been wheedled into fraternity with men whose trade was fraud.

It can only be accounted for by taking into consideration the *naiveté* of Mr. Sindandy. Had any sort of crime been necessary to carry out the measures of the Leech Club, that excellent young man could have spoken of it in anybody's parlor with the same mincing, matter-of-course manner as he would have talked of a game of croquet. And as his friends all regarded him as a model of refinement and correct moral principles, those who admitted him into their houses soon began to hear with indifference, and finally with sympathetic approval, his relation of the Club's *modus operandi*; which, if spoken by the most of men, would have been regarded as the bluster of a highwayman. It is believed by some who recollect him, that he could have found means of speaking of the cutting of a man's throat in order the more expeditiously to get at his purse, in such bland and common-place tones that his hearers would have thought he was relating a legitimate and praiseworthy proceeding. Others affirm that he could have made an interesting story of the robbery of a bank, and made it appear as a very creditable and able financial operation. Thus it must have been that, with constant association with Mr. Sindandy, Mr. Shoeman had come to regard as legitimate, things which he would have considered as infamous, had they been bluntly proposed by the most of men.

It was drawing toward the time for placing the candidates in the field for the fall elections. Though the party which he had always been connected with, was immeasurably in the minority in that county, Mr. Shoeman was prevailed upon to take the nomination for the Legislature, assured by the experienced Leech Club that he had only to use his money judiciously in order to be elected. It has been shown with what sort of "whipping the devil around the stump" Mr. Sindandy was accustomed to educate Mr. Shoeman up to the Leech Club's high standard of morality; and they actually persuaded him that he could accomplish this matter of

purchasing his election without violating either the statutes, or the principles of morality. And they also clearly demonstrated to him how, after he had spent large sums of money to secure his election to the Legislature, he might legitimately get it back through the perquisites due to that body.

Even if Mr. Shoeman had been troubled with no compunctions in regard to bribing the voters of his district to elect him, the Leech Club were entirely too shrewd to attempt among the honest rustics of the Catskill region the same open bribery that they were accustomed to in the city. Any man who had presumed to offer to buy right out and out one of those sturdy mountaineers would not have escaped with a whole skin, for he would most probably have received a sound threshing. The Leech Club had to plan for Mr. Shoeman indirect means to influence the voters, by which their friendship could be obtained without causing them to think they were bought.

Had Mr. Shoeman known beforehand the large amount of money he would be compelled to expend, he would never have engaged in the enterprise, even with the reiterated assurance of the Leech Club that he would have abundant opportunities to get it all back with interest. He was told that he would not have to expend more than a thousand, or at most two thousand dollars. As he was worth over a million—some said two millions—this would be no killing affair. Still, he had grown up with a methodical opinion of the value of money, and he did not care to spend even that comparatively small sum without some prospect of a return.

Mr. Shoeman's experience was much like that of other men who have embarked in similar enterprises. His first thousand dollars was gone, and scarcely any impression had been made in his favor. Then the second thousand was dissipated more swiftly than the mountain dew. Having invested two thousand, he did not feel like letting that go for nothing, and the sum was doubled. And like the man who loses at faro, this was again doubled; and so the doubling kept on till Mr. Shoeman no longer dared count his expenditures. He

simply went it blind, suffering himself to be bled like a helpless calf in the slaughter-pen.

And how was the money spent? It would be hard to give an account of it. The Leech Club did not appear openly in the matter. They employed a shrewd lawyer of the neighborhood as manager. He did not bribe any one. Oh! no. He knew better than that. He had frequent occasions to meet the countrymen of the district, in regard to various matters. Conversations between the lawyer and countrymen were overheard, which show how the matter was managed.

"Well, Mr. Jones," said the lawyer, "how's politics in your neighborhood? Suppose you'll vote for Shoeman? By the way, here are some documents I want you to take along and distribute among your neighbors. They contain some statistics on the manufacture of leather, which you know is a great interest in these parts. The trouble is that bark is getting scarce, and unless something is done to keep up the supply, the tanneries will have to stop, and hundreds of men will be thrown out of employment. If Mr. Shoeman is elected, he is going to introduce a bill to have the cleared mountain sides replanted with hemlock. Here's twenty dollars to pay you for the trouble of distributing the documents."

"But," said the countryman, "my politics are different from Mr. Shoeman's, and as we have a first-rate man on our ticket, I must vote for him. I like Shoeman very well as a man, but we don't agree in politics."

"Every man, Mr. Jones, must look a little after his bread and butter. If the tanning interest goes down, this section of country is used up. But whether you vote for Shoeman or not, it won't hurt you nor your neighbors to read these documents; and as Mr. Shoeman is anxious that the case shall be fairly understood, he has authorized me to see that they are distributed, and to pay any man of whatever politics for the trouble of carrying them around. He will consider it a favor for you to distribute them, whether you vote for him or not, and this twenty-dollar bill, I hope, will pay you for the trouble."

Here the lawyer thrusts the bill into Mr. Jones' hand, and, hastily excusing himself to see another client in the

back office, wishes Mr. Jones good-day, and retreats into the other room. Jones remains fixed to the spot, looking at the bill, in doubt whether he ought to take it, as he feels sure he cannot vote for Mr. Shoeman. He knocks at the door of the back office, to return the bill, but the lawyer is holding a private conversation, and cannot answer the summons. He does not want to leave the bill in the front office, where some one might pick it up; so he takes the bill and the documents, and departs for home, determined to return the money the next time he comes to the village.

As he passes the stores on Main street, he recollects that his wife requested him to get several articles, if he should have the money to spare after disposing of his load of bark. But the proceeds were entirely used up in paying several old grocery bills that had been standing since spring. He thinks of the twenty-dollar bill, and concludes that he will use it, and make it good with the next load of bark. The documents he takes home, and distributes them, and naturally has a friendly feeling for Mr. Shoeman, though he has not yet made up his mind to vote for him. The documents contain little of sound argument; though Mr. Jones thinks the idea of keeping up the supply of hemlock bark a good one. The thought does not happen to occur to him that he and his children will be in their graves long before the proposed newly-planted hemlock trees would be large enough for peeling. In fact, the pockets of the tax-payers were in a much fairer way of being peeled by Mr. Shoeman's system of politics than were any trees that he would be the means of planting.

When the lawyer left Mr. Jones, and retired into his back office, he there met Mr. Brown, a neighbor of Jones. Now, he wanted to "fix" Brown also, but it must be done in a different way.

"Ah! Brown," said he, "I have just seen your neighbor Jones, and have been talking politics with him. He is going to vote for Shoeman."

"Why, I can't see how that is," said Brown. "Jones is just as much opposed to Shoeman in politics as I am. I think you must have misunderstood him some way."

"No; he's got some documents that put a new light

on the matter. He'll most likely give you one, and I think when you've read it, you'll decide to vote for Shoeman, too."

"I guess not," was the reply.

"By the way, Brown," continued the lawyer, "Shoeman's party want to raise a pole at the cross-roads near where you live. Now, I don't happen to know any of his own party up there, and whoever does it, we expect to pay. As you're a friend of mine—I don't care anything about your politics—I'd just as lief give you the job as any one. I suppose you wouldn't have much difficulty in finding a suitable pole for the purpose on your wood-lot."

"I think I could accommodate him to that," said Brown. "I'd as soon sell him a stick of timber as anybody, and I'll put it up for him, too, for a fair price."

"Very good," said the lawyer. "You'll want a considerable force to raise the pole. Here's a hundred dollars. Will that pay expenses?"

"That's too much," said Brown.

"Well, take it along. You may need it all; and if you don't, you can return it to me the next time you are in the village. It is from Mr. Shoeman. I have nothing smaller than this hundred dollar bill by me." And he thrust the bill into Brown's hand and bid him good-day. As Brown was driving by the liquor store, his team was stopped, and a cask of beer was put into his wagon to treat the "boys" who should assist at the pole-raising.

Brown got the hundred-dollar bill changed before leaving the village, intending to give part of it back to the lawyer, but the latter kept out of sight. Brown had, however, no trouble in disposing of the money. Having seven or eight young fellows to assist him at the pole-raising, they got quite merry over the beer. Of course Brown had to tell them that he put up a pole for the opposite party merely as a matter of business, the same as he would sell a man a load of hoop-poles. He stated the sum that had been given him, saying that he intended to return a part of it. But the young men, in the exuberance of spirits superinduced by the beer, demanded ten dollars apiece for their labor. Mr. Brown found himself in a tight place, liable to be tossed in a blanket, or be

treated to some other species of "hazing," and he concluded to comply with the request. He then had no more left than a fair price for his own labor.

Draining the last pint from the beer-cask, the young men, with three rousing cheers for the generous Mr. Shoeman, dispersed.

The next week, the lawyer met Jones again, he having come to the village with another load of bark.

"Halloo! Jones," said the lawyer, "you're just the man I want to see. Mr. Shoeman has authorized me to buy all the bark I can get at an advance of twenty-five per cent. on old prices. Mr. Shoeman feels confident that, if he can get the bill passed that he has in view, there will be an advance in the price of leather, and he thinks of building two or three new tanneries. So you see, he's willing to give you bark-producers the benefit of the prospective advance. And he wants to get all the bark he can on hand, in view of what he considers a certain enhancement of the leather interests. For, between you and me, Shoeman is going to be elected. The interests of this section demand it, and people are bound to consult their interests. Now drive down this way with that bark, and I'll show you where to unload it."

As Mr. Jones had not disposed of his bark, he very naturally sold it to the man who offered him the best price. He thought he now had a good opportunity to refund the twenty dollars which the lawyer had given him a day or two before. After the bark was unloaded, the lawyer said:

"Now, I want you to bring us all the bark you have, at the same price. And tell your neighbors where they can find a good market. Here's your money for this load."

The lawyer thrust the money into Jones's hand, and then, hallooing to some one across the street, whom he pretended he wanted to speak to, ran off in such a hurry that Jones had not time to utter a word. He had either to keep the money, or drop it in the street. He was not very likely to do the latter. The fact was that this was the last load of bark which Jones had ready for market, and he greatly needed the money to buy necessities for his

family. The consequence was that this sum was also spent before he left the village.

It soon became noised about the country that Mr. Shoeman was paying twenty-five per cent. more than any one else for bark, and every one in that section who had a load to dispose of, took it to some one of his tanneries. The countrymen were always waited upon by some voluble individual like the lawyer referred to, who plied them with a recital of the great things which Mr. Shoeman was going to do for the tannery interests.

But Mr. Shoeman's opponent was a much more popular man than he, and had the advantage of belonging to the party largely in the majority. The opposing candidate was as active as the friends of his competitor, though not in the reckless and lavish expenditure of money. And notwithstanding the unprecedented outlay, Mr. Shoeman's chances of election appeared slim. He had already expended a respectable fortune, and it verily appeared that this would all be thrown away, and he have the chagrin of defeat added to that attendant upon the loss of his money. This would never do. If he could not sweep his opponent away with a little freshet of lucre, he must do it with a flood. His courage would have failed only for the fact that the Leech Club assured him he should have it all back.

Every man with whom Mr. Shoeman's agents came in contact, received some solid favor in money, if there was any excuse whatever to give it to him, without making him suspect that there was a desire to bribe him. There was generally some little nominal job that he was wanted to do, payment for which was forced upon him many fold the market value of the labor required. And this sort of insidious electioneering began to tell even among the sturdy, independent mountaineers. They were but men, and as favors were heaped upon them, they began to have a friendly leaning toward Mr. Shoeman, who scattered his favors indiscriminately among friends and foes, without exacting any promises of support from any one, or conveying the remotest hint of a bribe. The idea was generally circulated that he had only been prevailed upon to accept the nomination in view of the great things which he could probably do for the tanning in-

terest, which was a leading industry in his section of country. This also had considerable weight with the electors, for many people did not stop to consider the absurdity of the proposition that a member of the State Legislature could very materially aid a local manufacturing interest.

As has been intimated, with all the immense effort that had been made, Mr. Shoeman's election was anything but certain. As election day drew near, he literally trembled at the prospect of defeat. He would have cared little for this, had he not invested so much money in the result. Like many other staid citizens who have been induced to engage in gambling operations, he increased his stakes, hoping to get back what he had lost.

His agents commenced a sort of canvassing, to see how the voters felt. Men were cautiously sounded as to whether they would vote for Mr. Shoeman. The probable status of the voters throughout the district was thus carefully noted down, so that an intelligent conclusion could be arrived at. While many of his political opponents who had been the recipients of his insidious favors, signified their intention of voting for him, there still appeared to be a considerable majority against him in the district. He was almost distracted at the prospect of throwing so much money to the winds. He dared not tell his wife of the state of things.

But still he did not give up the battle. He had recourse to Leech Club advisors, and their prolific brains devised new means to accomplish his success. Where money had before been planted only in hills, it must now be sown broadcast. Men who were known to have made up their minds not to vote for Mr. Shoeman, must be managed in another way, so that at least their votes would not tell for the other candidate. A method of doing this was soon contrived. It was soon given out that Mr. Shoeman, in view of the large increase of the tanning business which he hoped to effect, was about to erect three new tanneries in another county. For the erection of these, the building of the dams, etc., he wanted three or four hundred men, at high wages. In engaging these men, those were generally selected who

were certain to vote against Mr. Shoeman. Only enough of his political friends were chosen to lull suspicion. And his generosity was frequently praised for employing so many of his known political opponents. He thus got out of the way several hundred voters, whose ballots would otherwise have been cast against him, and his managers would be sure to fix it so that these men would not be on hand to vote on election day. This last stroke, his managers considered as a clincher, insuring his election, but it was at a fearful expense. This climax of pipe-laying was perfected only a couple of weeks before election, and still all the other jets of corruption were kept open, in full play, spouting forth increasing streams of Mr. Shoeman's hard-earned dollars. The men who had been partially won by substantial favors, must be plied anew with the lethean draught of lucre. To slack up the supply now would be like attracting a school of fishes into a pool by tempting bait, and then throwing them the bare hook. Not only must the supply of delicious feed be kept up in the pool, but when the hook is finally thrown, it must be most generously baited.

At last the day of election came. Mr. Shoeman had become so nervous and dejected that he did not go to the polls at all. His managers, however, were on the alert. It was not their money that was being thus scattered to the winds, and they did not share their principal's anxiety. Like generals of an army who had fed and drilled their troops for a final decisive battle, they made sure of ample supplies for the last grand melee. Every poll in the district swarmed with men whose pockets were filled with Mr. Shoeman's money. But none of these men thought themselves bribed. They had only been paid a good price for their day's work to peddle tickets, and look out for Mr. Shoeman's interests around the polls. Every man, of whatever politics, who could be induced to accept a high price—several times the actual value of a day's work—to peddle tickets for Mr. Shoeman, was hired to do so. Of course these ticket-distributors would not think of voting against Mr. Shoeman themselves, and thus they were bought without being aware of it—without ever having it intimated to them that there was a purpose to purchase their votes.

It was a day of strife around the polls. The friends of the opposing candidate began to see how matters stood, and were loud in their denunciations of Mr. Shoeman for bribery. But when asked to point out any man who had been bribed, they could not do it. They could not show that any man had been offered money with the proviso that he should vote for Mr. Shoeman. It might be shown that certain men had received Mr. Shoeman's money, but when such a man was pointed out, he was ready to affirm under oath that there was no expressed or implied understanding that he should vote for Mr. Shoeman. He had told no one which candidate he would vote for, and was perfectly free to do as he pleased. And this was true. But very few, if any, who had thus accepted Mr. Shoeman's money, voted against him, and while their consciences were doubtless easy on the subject, they were just as much bribed as though there had been an express understanding.

At sunset the polls closed, and amid great anxiety the counting of the votes commenced. A circle of excited spectators gathered around the table where the canvassers were engaged, watching each ballot as it was unfolded, as if it were some one's death warrant. It was not till the next day that all the polls were heard from, and the result known. It then appeared that Mr. Shoeman was elected, but only by a moderate majority. However the fact may be deprecated that it was in the power of money to bring about a result contrary to the unbiased sentiment of the people, there is a congratulatory thought that this rural district was not entirely bought up by the large amount of money used; and that the buying was accomplished by indirections. The result showed that the voters of the Catskill regions were more independent and conscientious than the electors in many other localities; for it is not surprising that they were not all proof against such a reckless expenditure of money. The Leech Club would not have taken the trouble to manage the matter so adroitly in the city where they had their headquarters. There, and in many other places—be it said to the shame of freemen who make barter of their ballots—the voters were bribed openly, expressly, with a distinct understanding that

they were to vote for such and such candidates for a stipulated sum of money. And the sum which was covertly given by the agents of Mr. Shoeman to single persons for some nominal service, with the mere hope that such might thus be won to vote for their candidate, would have served to buy right out and out several voters in many localities which made much greater pretensions to refinement and culture than the Catskill regions. The amount of money spent by Mr. Shoeman was almost unprecedented, and with this he barely accomplished his election.

As the victorious general surveys the closely contested battle field, viewing his own dismounted guns, disabled caissons, and decimated legions, debating in his own mind whether there is really any difference between such a victory and a defeat, so Mr. Shoeman came forth to glance around among the *debris* of the conflict. Ten ordinary defeats would be immeasurably less disastrous than this victory. The insidious operations of his agents with money, which had not attracted much attention during the canvass, were just beginning to be fully comprehended, and were dawning upon the people as acts of infamy. Mr. Shoeman's reputation was gone. Those who had accepted his money, persuading themselves that they did not take it as bribes, began to see in what light their transactions were viewed by the community when the matter became entirely understood, and the blush of shame mantled upon many a cheek. The word, "bribery," "bribery," rang in their ears, and they began to ask themselves if it were possible that they had been bribed!

Mr. Shoeman had, without malice prepense, embarked upon a most disreputable and dangerous field of action, from which he could not, or at least was not likely to recede. When his accounts were balanced, he found that he had expended *two hundred thousand dollars*. The work on the three tanneries, the erection of which he had commenced in another county, was discontinued about two weeks after election, the excuse being that he could go no further with the work until he obtained the legislation that he desired. All the money expended on these enterprises was most probably a dead loss. And

the Leech Club had promised Mr. Shoeman that, whatever sum he might expend for election purposes, should be made up to him, *legitimately*, from the public treasury. So having cast his lot in with these people, and expended so large an amount of money after their fashion, he will be most likely to try to get it back in the same manner as the Leech Club enrich themselves. Having taken his lessons of them as to the manner of getting into official position, it will not be very surprising if he follows their instructions in regard to making the most he can out of his office. Henceforth he is to be known, not as the straightforward, economical business man, but the unscrupulous member of the Leech Club, planning ways to get from the tax-payers that which he uses in wholesale corruption of the ballot-box. However repugnant this may be to his better judgment, he has cast the die, he has squandered such an immense sum of money that he cannot bear the idea of letting it go for naught; and he sees no way to indemnify himself but to continue in the course marked out for him by the Leech Club.

In this chapter, events have been related, a little in advance of other portions of the tale.

CHAPTER XVII.

PHEBE GREENWOOD HAS A MIDNIGHT CALL.

The stories of supernatural manifestations had been extensively circulated in the Catskill region, and though the people were not superstitious, these tales had made considerable impression. When Phebe Greenwood heard a tap at her bedroom window at midnight, and on awakening, heard her name whispered without, very naturally a thrill of terror ran through her frame. She at first uttered a slight scream; when the window was raised, and a head was thrust in, and some words spoken. Strange to

say, this remarkable and unseasonable visitation did not cause her to faint. Nor did she scream again. The head withdrew, and the window was lowered. Phebe then arose from her bed, and dressed, as well as she could in the dark. But she did not then seek to alarm the family, as if the house had been visited by a goblin or a burglar. Nay, she raised the window, her room being on the ground floor, and essayed to climb out into the dark night. She was assisted by a pair of arms without, and had no great difficulty in making her exit.

Supported by the encircling arm of a dark figure, she walked away a short distance to the cover of some trees. Here the two sat down and conversed in a low tone.

"Oh! John," said she, "how did you escape from that terrible place?"

John Woodman, for it was he, related to her the circumstances of his receiving the strange message, and of his escape through the aid of the Hermit of the Catskills. He also told her the story of his incarceration, and of the intimations he had received from the Hermit that he had been the victim of a conspiracy gotten up by the Leech Club.

"Indeed, John," said she, "this is wonderful. I have heard a good deal about that Hermit of the Catskills. People say he has dealings with the Evil One. But I shall never believe any such thing as that about him any more, since he has done such a kind thing for you. And, John, I never believed you guilty. I always said it was some contrivance of the Leech Club to get you out of the way, just as the Hermit says."

"How is my mother, Phebe?"

"Oh! John, I am sorry to say she is very ill. Your imprisonment has worried her so that she has been taken down to her bed."

"I must see her this very night."

"Oh! pray, John, don't do it. There have been reports around here that you have escaped, and that the Leech Club, thinking you would come home, have men secretly watching near your mother's dwelling. I believe this is so, for last night Mrs. Smith, who was staying with your mother, thought she saw two men dodging among

the trees. I assure you, John, your mother shall be well cared for, and I will go myself to-morrow and tell her that you have escaped, and that you are innocent. I am sure that will make her well. But I beg you, John, don't run into the clutches of that terrible Leech Club."

"Phebe, I must go; but don't fear. If they have men watching, they would hardly watch all night. And even if they do, I should see them, and escape. I am so well acquainted with the mountains around that I would soon get out of their way."

"Well, John, I don't know that I ought to try to persuade you from seeing your poor mother. It would be a great comfort to her. Only, John, do be careful."

"Now, Phebe, I must bid you good night. It is hard that one who has committed no crime, and who has a sick, widowed mother, should be compelled to hide in his own native hills. But a day of retribution will come. It makes me strong, Phebe, to know that you have faith in my innocence. This thought will bear me up to noble deeds, and unless the fates have decreed otherwise, I shall make myself worthy of you."

"I know you will, John. Only the other night I dreamed that you were a judge, holding court, sitting in judgment upon some members of the Leech Club; while they looked like poor frightened dogs that had been caught killing sheep."

"Thank you for those words, Phebe. They have entered my soul as an inspiration and a prophecy. I cannot tell you how it is, but faith has entered my mind like a flash, that I shall live to see your dream fulfilled. Good night, my dear, faithful, noble girl. You are worthy of the noblest in the land."

"Wait one minute, John—" and she went back to the house, entered her room by the window, and soon returned, and handing John a billet, said:

"Read this to-morrow, John. It may be a comfort to you."

John placed the missive in his pocket, and then with an embrace, they parted.

John Woodman walked away, not as a proscribed criminal who might at any time be captured, and returned to prison. He walked away as one who was marching to the

shrine of Minerva, to receive from her hands a chaplet of fame. How rich one may be in hope, while worse than poor pecuniarily. John Woodman towered up in the gloom of night, as if he had just fallen heir to a kingdom. It mattered not that he had yet all his anticipated fame and fortune to win; that he had lately been subject to a great humiliation; that he even had to hide from the world in which his fame was ultimately to be achieved; still he felt as proud in the contemplation of what he expected to be as if he had already accomplished the anticipated greatness. The words of faith and encouragement spoken to him by Phebe Greenwood had lifted him from the slough of despair to the beatitude of hope. Her declaration that she regarded him beyond all question as innocent of any crime was the same as if all the world had given him this assurance. So much may a true woman do to spur men on to noble aspirations.

John pursued his solitary way to the house of his mother, a couple of miles distant. Drawing near to the dwelling, he saw a light, showing that some one was caring for the sick. He knocked, and a woman came to the door. She raised up both hands in astonishment as she recognized him. Begging him to be seated, she went into the next room to break gently the joyful news to his mother. John was soon at her bedside, and the scene which followed it is unnecessary to relate.

"Oh!" John," said she, after recovering; "it is such a comfort to see you before I die. I was sure you would come. I told Mrs. Smith not more than two hours ago that I should see you before my eyes close forever on these old mountain-tops that I have loved so well."

"But, mother, you are not going to die now, after I have braved everything to come and see you. Live to see me humble those wretches who brought me to unmerited disgrace, and you to this condition!"

"John, I am afraid it cannot be. Already the grand old mountains seem to be fading from my sight, as I gaze through the window at them by day. But I feel that I can leave them contented for a purer land, now that I know my son is innocent."

"Oh! mother, I think you will get better now that the chief cause of your sickness is removed. Phebe Green-

wood will be here to-morrow, and she will tell you more than I have time to say ; for I must not tarry too long lest the minions of the Leech Club pounce upon me."

"But do, John, stay half an hour more. I have not strength to talk, but it will do me just as much good to have you sit there, where I can look at you."

"Ah!" thought John, "the policy of the Leech Club will not allow me the poor boon of sitting here half an hour by my sick, and perhaps dying, mother. Should they allow me this, their precious interests might suffer. It is not enough that they should disgrace me; they must also murder my mother in order to succeed in their wicked purposes."

This thought John, but he said it not. He did not want to excite his parent. So he informed her of the necessity of his departure ere daylight broke over the hills. After taking a most affectionate adieu, he passed out into the room where he first entered.

John had no more than gotten his hat and staff than a rap was heard at the door. Mrs. Smith opened the door, when she was confronted by three men, who, without waiting for an invitation, walked in. They were stout, burly fellows, armed with pistols and clubs. John stood on the farther side of the room, and as their eyes fell upon him, one of them exclaimed :

"Ah! my prison bird, we have caged you at last. Take that hand out of your breast pocket; don't draw a pistol, or I'll riddle you with all the bullets in this six-shooter."

The three ruffians were about to advance on John, when suddenly a new personage appeared upon the scene. He entered through an open window near where John stood. At first John was disposed to regard this person as one more added to the force of the assailants, but instantly his countenance brightened up, for he recognized the Hermit of the Catskills. He was apparently armed only with a stout staff, and he stood immovable for a moment, gazing upon the ruffians, as if he would wither them with the lofty scorn of his dark brow. And this presence evidently had its effect on them, for the pallor of their countenances was plainly visible. Soon he spoke in tones deep and stinging, pointing his staff toward the door behind the ruffians :

"Myrmidons of the Leech Club, your way lies there! Is not the house of sickness, and perhaps of death, sacred against your foul and malarious presence? Go while it is yet in your power to do so, or your bodies will be made kindred carrion with your souls!"

John Woodman now drew a revolver, and leveling it at the ruffians, said in tones which bore the significance of death:

"Go!"

The knees of the ruffians fairly shook under them, and they turned and fled like craven wolves frightened from their prey.

John went back into the sick-room to reassure his mother that he was safe, and again bidding her good-bye, walked out into the open air, where the Hermit was apparently awaiting him.

"Ah!" said John, "you are my good angel!"

"I will not reproach you for this temerity," said the Hermit. "It is natural that a true young man should want to see his sick mother. I cannot ask you to leave the neighborhood while your mother lies at the point of death. But you see how careful you must be to keep out of the fangs of those bloodhounds. Follow me."

The Hermit started off at a rapid pace, which John, with all his inured agility in mountain climbing, found it difficult to maintain. They soon reached the wooded mountain side, but the Hermit slackened not his gait. He plunged deeper and deeper into the dark, gloomy solitudes, and so tortuous was his path through gorges and over crests and ledges, that John, in spite of his long familiarity with the mountains, was soon completely bewildered as to his whereabouts. He had no more idea as to what locality he was in than if he had never traversed these hills. They continued their meanderings till after daylight. At length they halted before a high rock with smooth sides, which it would have been impossible to scale without a ladder. It was surrounded by lofty trees, and up one of these the Hermit climbed as far as he could. He then reached out his staff, which he had taken up with him, and with a small hook on its end, grappled a green ivy vine that was apparently growing naturally on the rock. He

pulled this vine towards him, and soon it was seen to be fastened to a concealed rope on the top of the rock. The rope was drawn down some twenty feet, until the Hermit had it in his hand. The other end was then found to be firmly fastened to the top of the rock. The rope, at short intervals, was provided with loops, into which a person could place his foot, and easily climb to the top of the rock.

The Hermit now beckoned to John to follow him up the tree. As the trunk of the tree was thickly studded with limbs, John had no difficulty in ascending. When he reached the point where the Hermit stood, the latter commenced ascending the rock by placing his feet in the loops of the rope. He soon reached the top, and then motioned John to follow. John climbed up with ease, owing to the accommodating loops.

On reaching the summit of the rock a most complete place of concealment was found. There was a deep hollow in the top of the rock, so that a man standing therein could not be seen except by an observer who might find means to get up to some point higher than the rock, so as to look down into the cavity. As there was no higher object near, there was little danger of this. After John had gotten up, the Hermit drew the rope up also, leaving the green vine upon the side of the rock, so that it looked as if it had grown there, the same as before. The hermit next put his strength against the side of the cavity, which bore the shattered appearance common to rocks, and it receded, leaving an opening just large enough to admit a man's body. Into this he crawled, taking the rope with him. John followed. He found they were in a chamber not much more than large enough to contain the two men. In this narrow chamber was a rude couch, though a very comfortable one, some of the simplest cooking utensils, a pail for containing water, a small quantity of charcoal, and a diminutive furnace for cooking.

This pent-up chamber was nothing more than a natural fissure in the rock. And this fissure appeared to cleave the rock asunder, only it narrowed as it approached the outer surface, where it was nothing more than a good sized crack. This afforded plenty of air for

the chamber. The fissure appeared to reach far down into the rock, and the floor of the little chamber consisted of timbers placed across the fissure. The door by which the Hermit entered was simply a natural hole, which he had ingeniously concealed by a flat slab of stone, which, when in position, looked like a natural fragment of the rock. This slab, as it stood on edge, could be pushed back by the strength of a man, it being caught within by a wooden spring which kept it from falling too far back. The occupant once within this chamber, could place the stone slab back over the entrance; and there were some heavy stones at hand to pile against it on the inside, so that no one without could push it open. Should a stranger, by any possibility get on top of the rock, when the door of the chamber was closed, he could discover no sign of an opening in the rock. It was the most ingenious place of concealment ever devised.

After resting a few minutes, the Hermit took from a locker in the side of the grotto some provisions, consisting of bread, meat and coffee. He then took the pail, to which a string was fastened, and let it down into the fissure of the rock. John, on looking down, saw that a natural cavity in the rock was filled with water. At first he thought the water came from a spring, but afterwards discovered that it was caught on top of the rock in time of showers, and conveyed there by means of bark leaders. So a good supply of water was always on hand.

The Hermit took the water, the provisions, and the charcoal furnace, with a few pieces of charcoal, and crawled back out of the chamber into the open hollow in the top of the rock. Here he started a fire, and soon had their breakfast cooking. The charcoal made no perceptible smoke, and in the hollow of the rock they were secure from observation, had any one happened along in that obscure locality.

After they had refreshed themselves with food, the Hermit showed John how to manage with the rope ladder in case he wanted to go down from the rock for a time, for it would not do to leave the rope hanging in open sight. A string was tied to the end of the rope before it was let down. This string was doubled around a smooth frag-

ment on top of the rock, while the descending climber held fast to one end of the string. After he had gotten down, he had only to pull on the string and the rope was drawn back, and remained in a coil out of sight in the cavity of the rock. A sudden jerk then broke the string off, it being made weakest at the point where it was tied to the rope. The string was then pocketed, and nothing remained in sight about the rock but the green vine, with which to pull down the rope the next time it was wanted.

The rock jutting up high on one side, afforded ample shade from the sun's rays at any time of day; and the inhabitant of this cozy hiding place could spread a mattress on top of the rock, in the open air, and lounge at his ease during the long summer days, secure from observation. A few choice books were among the contents of this strange retreat, and these the Hermit placed at John's disposal. There was something peculiarly enchanting in this secluded situation to an imaginative temperament. One could retire here, almost beyond the possibility of discovery from the rest of the world. John supposed that he had been favored with admission to the secret dwelling of the Hermit, which many had vainly endeavored to discover; and he did not so greatly wonder that the recluse found a fascination in these solitudes.

The Hermit seemed in no hurry to descend from his fortress. Dinner hour came, and he again provided a repast. They had about half finished the meal, when the baying of a hound was heard. Soon the dog came close around the base of the rock, and showed no disposition to go any further, keeping up a constant baying. In a few minutes the voices of men were joined with the yelping of the hound. The Hermit motioned John to rise up, and look cautiously through a crevice in the rock. He saw a gang of about a dozen men, among whom he recognized the three who had attempted to capture him at his mother's house the night previous. John by no means felt at ease in view of the force that was hunting him. It was evident that they had employed a blood-hound to scent him out.

But the Hermit, having surveyed the gang through a crevice, calmly resumed his meal, and John, ashamed to

manifest any undue anxiety, followed his example. It required all his philosophy to do so, for it was a peculiar state of affairs. The ferocious dog bayed at the trunk of the tree up which John and the Hermit had climbed to get upon the rock. It was evident that the pursuers were convinced that the fugitives were in the vicinity. They climbed the tree as far as they could, and still they were more than twenty feet below the top of the rock. Still, with this unpleasant proximity of the pursuers, the Hermit continued his meal as if nothing had happened. After the meal was finished the Hermit carefully gathered up everything that would indicate the presence of a human being, and placed it within the grotto. The noise below had become less boisterous, showing that whatever was going on down there was more methodical. The Hermit looked through a crevice, and saw that the pursuers were constructing a rude ladder with which to get upon the rock. He beckoned to John to come and view the proceedings. He showed John a bow, and some steel-pointed arrows, with which he could have picked off the bloodhound before the men arrived on the spot; but this would have betrayed their presence in the vicinity. John was armed with a revolver, and he thought they could, at least, sell their lives dearly.

The Hermit having satisfied himself that the pursuers were determined to get upon the rock, concluded it was time to get to cover. He and John then retired within the grotto, and closed its stone door. They then piled the stones against the slab, so that, should it be sounded, it would appear like the solid rock, and could not be pushed open.

The pursuers were not very long in cutting down a knotted sapling, over twenty feet long, up which a man could easily climb. This was gotten up into the top of the tree, up which John and the Hermit had climbed, and there lashed fast with ropes, which the pursuers brought with them. This knotted pole resting against the rock, formed a rude ladder, up which the assailants climbed to the top of the rock. They found nothing to indicate that any human being had ever been there before them. They rent the air with curses at their disappointment, and some of their number began to devise

means to sound the rock to see if there might be a cave within it. By means of their rope they managed to raise up quite a boulder from below, and this they threw about with great vigor. It often struck the stone door of the grotto, and John greatly feared that the slab would be shattered, and reveal the hiding place.

The Hermit was evidently surprised at this new procedure. This was something he had not looked for. Thud, thud, thud, the boulder dashed around like a battering cannon ball, and when it struck the stone door of the grotto, the inside barricade was observed to shake. Should the slab crack, the artificial embankment of stones inside would be discovered, and the fugitives would be unearthed. The Hermit began to prepare his weapons, as if for defense. Every stone that could be obtained, was piled against the battered door. Every available timber in the grotto was braced against the barricade. And this was not done a moment too soon. The place had excited the suspicions of the assailants, and they battered the door with redoubled fury. Finally their battering boulder was shattered, and they were obliged to cease until they could get another one from below.

During the lull, their conversation could plainly be heard within the grotto, and John could hear them express their belief that they had him caged within. He perceived that they were getting up two or three boulders with which to cannonade the little castle. It might seem that it could not long resist these rude attacks; and it was apparent that the Hermit was of this opinion, for he seemed to be preparing to escape through some secret passage in the rock, or to make his exit in some supernatural manner. He lowered the rope down into the fissure heretofore mentioned as penetrating the bowels of the rock. John's dismay may be imagined when the Hermit, without one word of explanation, passed down on the rope, and disappeared in the darkness of the yawning fissure.

"Good Heavens!" said John, "am I the victim of a demon's arts as well as those of brutish men? Is the Hermit of the Catskills the evil spirit he is said to be? And has he only rescued me from prison and brought me here that he may exhibit to me the powers of his infernal

arts, that my final fall may be the greater? Great God! the powers of earth and hell conspire against me!"

Now the bombardment again commenced, and boulder after boulder struck against the devoted door. Then there was a lull, and he heard the ruffians addressing him as if they felt sure of his presence there.

"Come, my nice woodchuck, you might as well come out of your hole! We're bound to have you any way."

"Come, come, don't you know that toads are sometimes blasted out of the solid rock, where they have been a thousand years? Well, you hain't been in there quite as long as that, but we're goin' to blast you out. We don't mean to leave you in there to be a fossil. It wouldn't be kind of us to do so."

Then the battering commenced again, the barricade of stone and timber shook beneath the shock, and John made up his mind that he was lost. He felt fully convinced that the Hermit was really a demon, who could disappear at pleasure in the solid rock. He had brought him there to mock, and leave him to perish. John prepared his revolver for the encounter, determined never to be taken alive. He would have followed the Hermit down the rope into the fissure, but the latter had evidently foreseen such an event, and had found means to remove the rope and take it with him. John began to think that Hermit, rope and all, were but phantoms.

All at once there was a halt in the battering process, and as silence prevailed, John heard the yelping of the hound as if the animal had been wounded. Again he heard a sharp yelp, and then the voice of the hound was heard no more. Next there was a yell of rage and pain among the men on the top of the rock. Evidently some of them had been wounded. This was followed by a discharge of pistols by the men on the rock. But soon another cry of pain was heard among them. And now John judged that they were leaving the rock in haste. It was not long till all was still, and John breathed free. In the course of an hour John removed the barricade, and came forth from the grotto.

Looking about he comprehended what had taken place. The bloodhound lay dead a short distance from the rock, pierced with an arrow. Blood was found on top of the

rock, where the Hermit had sent his missiles among the ruffians.

As John afterwards learned, the Hermit had made a diversion by getting clear of the rock through some mysterious passage. As soon as he was free in the woods, he shot the hound. The yelps of the dog caused the assailants to rush to the edge of the rock to see what was the matter. As soon as they thus showed themselves, the Hermit, with the unerring accuracy of his Indian ancestors, sent an arrow among them, designed only to wound, and not to kill. The Hermit then purposely showed himself, and drew the fire of their revolvers. He then continued the discharge of arrows, wounding the assailants at pleasure. The Hermit either had, by some mysterious means, summoned assistance, or else he so rapidly shifted his position in the obscurity of the thick forest, discharging arrows from different points, as to create the impression that he had a considerable number of followers engaged in the attack. The consequence was a precipitate retreat of the ruffians, and as soon as they had gotten well out of sight, the Hermit returned to the rock. He ascended by the pole which they had left lashed to the top of the tree.

On examination of the stone door of the grotto, it was found not to be cracked in the least. Nothing more than a few scales were slivered off by the persistent battering. It was a hard granite slab, about six or eight inches thick, and from all appearances, the assailants might have battered away till doomsday, without making any impression on it. Probably the only anxiety of the Hermit was that they might discover a shaking of the slab, and thus come to the conclusion that there was certainly a secret chamber behind it. They might then bring drills and powder to remove it. By making the diversion that he did, the Hermit had no doubt left the impression with the assailants that they had simply been battering at the solid rock. They were also inspired with a new and wholesome terror of the Hermit of the Catskills. The latter heard them as they retreated, cursing their own stupidity for spending so much time in battering a solid rock, and making such a rumpus as to awaken from the recesses of the mountains the Hermit of the Catskills, and

draw upon themselves the vengeance of him and his crew. As was afterwards ascertained, their story was hardly believed at the castle of the Leech Club, and they were laughed at for getting frightened at the phantoms of the forest. It is doubtful if they could again have found the rock where they met with their discomfiture.

After the Hermit had again placed the rope for ascending the rock in proper position, he removed all vestiges of the attack which had been made on the place, and it bore the same natural appearance that it had before. The dead hound was taken to a distance, and buried. The retreat was, if possible, safer than before, for the same party, aside from their fear of the Hermit, would never spend their time again in battering what they now believed to be a solid rock. Moreover, the Hermit showed John an inner chamber from the first, entered by the removal of a granite slab, which, like the first, appeared to be part and parcel of the rock. These slabs were so nicely balanced on a sharp edge, resting in a groove, that they were easily swung backward when not braced within. Thus, should the first grotto, by any possibility be found, the removal of the occupant to another secret chamber would create the impression that the place had been abandoned. But the greatest protection was the superstitious idea, which was constantly gaining ground, that the mysterious denizens of the Catskills had means of traversing at pleasure the bowels of the mountains. Concerning the mysterious manner in which the Hermit had descended through the bowels of the rock, and gained the forest, John was left in ignorance, and many were the vague conjectures in which he indulged in regard to the probable supernatural powers of his strange friend.

John had supposed that he was to be, for a time, a fellow occupant with the Hermit. In this he was mistaken. Whether or not this was the domicil of the Hermit, he soon signified his intention to depart, but gave John to understand that he should be provided with food. John, after his escape from prison, had concluded to remain concealed for a while in the Catskills, and, in order that the time should not be wasted, he had brought a few law books with him, determined to continue the study which he had pursued for a year or two past, during his leisure

moments at his mountain home. He described to the Hermit the spot where the books were concealed, and the next day the latter brought them to him. These, with the few books which comprised the store of the grotto, afforded John profitable employment in his strange abode.

Thus was John left alone in the gloom of the forest, and thus did ambition sustain him, under such strange and trying circumstances, to persevere in preparing himself for the profession which he hoped to practice some time in the future.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JOHN WOODMAN AGAIN VISITS HIS MOTHER.

JOHN WOODMAN had been charged by the Hermit of the Catskills not to attempt to visit his mother until notified by the Hermit that the way was clear. But a presentiment came upon John that she was near her end, and he resolved at all hazards to see her ere she breathed her last. John had learned the way out from his obscure retreat, and he approached the residence of his mother as near as he dared by day, and when near the hour of midnight, he crept cautiously to the door and was admitted. He found his mother's strength fast failing. Her eyes brightened up with ineffable joy as he approached her bedside.

"Ah! John," said she, in feeble tones, "I knew again that you would come to me this, my last night on earth."

John felt that what she said was true, and while he pressed her frail hand, he said:

"Oh! mother! dear mother! that I should be driven from, and only allowed to see you by stealth at this trying hour!"

"Weep not, John;" said the dying woman. "I see a

bright future for you in this world ; and the poor boon of undisturbed fellowship that is denied us in the brief moments that are left to me, we will make up when we meet within the pearly gates, where no such disturbers as now persecute you can enter to interfere with our happy meeting. While you have many years to live, John, it will not be long till we will embrace each other in that glorious meeting ! Only think, John, it won't be long ! Why, John, it only seems as though I was about to bid you good-night, and that this was to be the last night of our poverty ; while we were to awake to bid each other good morning, the inheritors of unspeakable riches. It seems as though I was only going to sleep, to rest a few hours, and then to awake to meet you in such blissful and changed circumstances. So short do years seem as we approach eternity, John !”

“ Oh ! mother, I could bear this bereavement manfully in view of such sublime faith as yours, if I could only sit down peacefully and spend with you in sweet communion of soul these last glorious moments, without the harrowing thought that I may at any instant be seized by the prowling human wolves without, and dragged from your side to prison !”

“ But, believe me, John, even if you should be seized by those wicked men now, you will triumph in the end. Somehow, John, your worldly future seems so clear and honorable to me that I don't feel the least concern for your welfare.”

“ My own dear mother, it is worth a lifetime, and the risk of years of imprisonment, to sit here and witness such heavenly faith as yours. So long as I live the remembrance of this shall be a cynosure to lift my eyes up to the God who inspires you, and keep my feet from the paths of sin.”

“ How happy you make me, John, by such dutiful words. Could any woman be more blest in her dying hour than I ? Here is my only and loved son standing by my bedside, resolving to keep from the ways of sin, though persecuted almost to death by malicious enemies. I had feared, John, that your heart would be bitter and revengeful under your troubles. Oh ! John, how I wish you could stay with me till the last moment—that,

as my eyes close in death, they might rest upon you, as the last sweet remembrance of earth, as I awake at the feet of my Saviour in the bright world. But, John, this sweet consolation must be denied me, for it would not be safe for you. And I think it is selfish in me to wish it; for think of the bliss I have beside! How few are so blest as I am. How few are so rich in their dying hour as to have a dutiful son braving death and imprisonment to see his mother in her last hour, and receive her dying farewell and blessing!"

Such riches were, indeed, beyond estimation. But this sacred and holy scene was destined to a rude interruption. Had John's attention been attracted from the dying form of his mother, toward the window, he would have seen a brutal face without, pressed against a pane of glass, peering in at him in a sinister manner. John was only attracted by the noise made by the ruffian in trying to raise the window, which was fortunately fast on the inside, and detained the marauder for an instant. John saw the state of things, and exclaimed:

"Mother, I am pursued! I must leave you!"

"Stay one moment, John! Kneel and receive my blessing!"

John knelt, and the hand of the dying mother was placed on her son's head, as she uttered a brief prayer, and commended him to the God in whom she trusted. John then impressed a fervent kiss on her pale lips, and arose. His pursuers, looking in at the window, had been awed a moment by the solemn scene. But as John arose and looked about for an avenue of escape, not even the room of death was sacred to the agents of the Leech Club. They raised the window, and were climbing in. Fortunately John was well acquainted with the ways of the humble cottage, and he rushed up a narrow stairway into the garret. The ruffians hesitated for an instant to follow him up there in the dark, and this gave him time to let himself down from a window in the farther end of the garret. He was met by one of the pursuers, who was watching without.

"Surrender, or take the contents of this pistol!" were the first words that greeted his ears; and the challenge came from a man not more than six feet off.

Without uttering a word, and utterly regardless of the weapon, John sprang upon the ruffian, and felled him with a tremendous blow of his powerful fist. The fellow was so taken by surprise that he failed to fire his pistol, and he was so completely stunned by the blow, that he lay senseless on the ground. John then darted like a deer for the mountain, which he gained before his assailants had resuscitated their fallen comrade. The marauders then walked sullenly away.

The dying woman was cheered by the tidings from her attendant that her son had escaped.

The next day it was spread through the neighborhood that death had entered that lonely household during the night. Soon several of the neighbors visited the solemn precincts of death. Among the first of these was Phebe Greenwood; and as Mr. Shoeman's residence was near, decency required that some of his family should be present; and his daughter, Mary, the wife of Mr. Sindandy, repaired to the mournful scene. Phebe happened to meet Mary without the cottage, and she could not restrain her indignation.

"It is a burning shame," said she, passionately, "that those robbers of the Leech Club could not let John stay to see the last breath of his mother!"

"You ought to be ashamed, Phebe," said Mary, bitterly, "to talk so about my husband's friends!"

"Yes, a precious lot of friends your husband has! I tell you, Mary, they are all thieves and robbers, and one of these days you will find it out to your sorrow. Mary, I wouldn't marry one of that gang, as you have done, for all the wealth in the State."

This sally cut Mary to the quick, and she retaliated.

"You wouldn't marry one of the fine gentlemen of the Leech Club! No, indeed! but I suppose you would marry a man who has been to the penitentiary, if your father would let you!"

"That's very nice of you to say, when your husband planned a conspiracy to get John Woodman to the penitentiary, to get him out of the way, hoping I would marry that bejeweled, stalking dummy of a scarecrow, Mr. Flitaway. I tell you what it is, the men who wickedly got John into prison will be there before long them

selves. And if that beautiful husband of yours and Mr. Flitaway are not linked together for the State prison some of these days, I'll miss my guess."

"Oh! dear," said Mary scornfully, "I'd like to see you get any of them in prison, when they've got the keys of the prison in their pockets!"

"It is not the first time that the thieves have got possession of keys that they ought not to have. The Leech Club thieves, indeed, have just now the keys of the money drawers as well as the prisons, and they are using them very industriously, to be sure. I have heard before of thieves managing to lock their keepers up, while they went about helping themselves for a short time, and living gloriously. But the keepers soon got out, and put an end to their fun, locking them up again where they belonged. And just as it was no disgrace to the keepers to be overpowered and locked up for a short time, so I consider it no disgrace for John Woodman to be overpowered and locked up by the Leech Club thieves. One of these days John will have a hand in locking them up."

Mary could find no words to reply to her better informed and more intelligent antagonist, and she burst into tears in the agony of mute anger, under this withering retaliation. Phebe, though naturally of a mild disposition, had her indignation so thoroughly aroused at the injustice that had been heaped upon John and his dying mother, that she could not restrain the utterance of the scathing thoughts that rushed through her mind.

The next day took place the last sad ceremonies over the remains of Mrs. Woodman, ere her body was consigned to the tomb. Mr. Sindandy and his wife thought fit to show by their presence at the funeral that they entertained no animosity against the mother of him whom they styled the "fugitive convict." No one supposed that John would have the hardihood to come forth from his hiding place and join the mourners, and take a last sad look at the face now passive in death, which had been so dear to him in life; to view once more that loved countenance ere the remorseless clay closed down upon it forever. The surprise, then, was great, just as the man

of God lifted his voice in solemn exhortation, to see John walk in, and take his seat near the coffin.

Had Mr. Sindandy been John's murderer, and been thus confronted by his ghost, his agony could not have been greater. The presence of his victim was a terrible menace to the safety of the magnate of the Leech Club. For Mr. Sindandy knew in his heart that he was the chief of the conspiracy by which John had been immured in the penitentiary. Only let this be proved among the people of the neighborhood, and nothing could save him from State prison; for at that time the Leech Club did not control the courts in that county. Mr. Sindandy turned livid, and fairly shook in his seat. He seemed to essay to arise, and would probably have left the room but for his wife, who grasped him by the arm with an expostulating look.

The countrymen who were gathered at the funeral, thinking that Mr. Sindandy entertained a purpose of going for some one to arrest John on this solemn occasion, scowled fiercely, showing that it would have fared badly with any one who should attempt such a thing then and there. But Mr. Sindandy, whose face had become as pale as that of the dead one in the coffin, managed to contain himself, and the mournful services proceeded. John remained unmolested through the services, and followed the remains to the grave. He was conveyed thither in the wagon of one of his old neighbors.

After the last touching words had been uttered by the man of God over the dust of the dear departed, and the last shovel-full of earth was heaped upon the fresh mound, and the company began to disperse, John walked arm-in-arm with one of his old neighbors from the burying-ground. Phebe Greenwood was among the company, and with her he exchanged glances of recognition. It was evident that John's case was becoming pretty well understood among his neighbors, for they cast lowering looks upon Mr. Sindandy; and his wife wore a troubled countenance, as if her husband had been convicted of a felony. She seemed perfectly aware of the feeling that existed toward him, and seemed to say by her looks, as she held fast to his arm: "Well, you hostile

people, regard him as you will, I shall still cling to him." So withering was the effect of the umbrage in which he was regarded by the company, that his wife actually seemed ready to take the defense for him, rather than to assume the aggressive toward John Woodman, whom she, a short time ago, regarded as a fugitive at the mercy of her husband.

It did, indeed, really seem that John and Mr. Sindandy had all at once changed places—that the former was the pursuer and the latter the fugitive. John mingled freely with the people, showing no signs of guilty fear; while Mr. Sindandy slunk away with his wife clinging to his arm, anxious to reach his buggy, and get away from that crowd, which acted like a blighting shade on his spirits. Poor Mary, as she clung to him, looked as if she felt that she was linked to a criminal whom it would be unkind of her to desert.

After the company had dispersed, John, shaking hands with his most intimate friends, walked quietly away, and disappeared in the forests of the mountains. Notwithstanding the feeling in the community in favor of John, it would not have been safe for him to remain openly in the neighborhood. He was under the ban of the laws, and, however unjustly, the minions of the Leech Club would have soon hurried him away to prison.

The hearth where John had spent so many happy evenings with his mother and his books, was now completely desolate. His little clearing must grow up to bushes and weeds; for he who would have improved it is a fugitive, obliged to burrow out of sight like a hunted coney in the caves of the mountains. His humble cabin must become the abode of bats and owls, and the rope-walk wherein the spider shall spin his web from beam to beam; for the fire has gone out on the hearth, and the hand that would have secured the crevices to keep out the birds of night, and plied the broom to the detriment of the spider's woof, is cold in the grave.

Even the dumb animals feel their desolateness, now. that mistress as well as master has left them. The cow lows mournfully; the oxen bellow in louder grief; the pet sheep bleats plaintively; the fowls gather in a

group, and stretching up their heads, twitter anxiously, as if to say, "how is this? and what shall we do now?" the faithful dog surveys the whole with a look of responsibility, as if saying to himself sadly, "Alas! I am the only one left to look after all these things now;" and he whines in touching grief at his bereavement, and the helplessness of those under his charge.

Thus ruthlessly had that once cheery mountain home been made as desolate as if the surrounding forests had been suddenly turned into Upas trees giving forth an odor of death; or a destroying angel had breathed upon it a pestilential atmosphere. The smoke, perchance, will ascend no more toward the sky from its stone chimney, nor the hum of industry, accompanied by the voice of the good matron occasionally arising in song, be heard within its walls. She felt rich in her only son; rich in the scanty though sufficient products of the small clearing, which he with sturdy hand brought to her humble store; rich in the proceeds of her churn, her poultry yard, her spinning-wheel, and the many ingenious and economical productions of her industrious needle, so often plying cheerfully to contrive something for her son or herself. All these little things were much more valuable to her than a splendid establishment is to a millionaire. All the little and simple things which made up her life came by cheerful, though not exhaustive toil, and were therefore highly prized. And above all was she rich in the faith which sustained her so grandly at the last. But the voice of her praise and her industry is as still as the walls of her now deserted cabin. The smoke of the meal which she so proudly prepared for her beloved son, will no longer give forth its fragrance; and the hills will no more resound to the horn as it echoed through the inspiration of her warm breath to call him from the field to partake with her of their frugal and healthful fare, with which she spread the humble board. He who was her life and her pride was ruthlessly snatched from her, and the stroke was so heavy that it hurried her to the tomb.

But the son of her heart was in the way of the designs of the Leech Club; and how could their interests be allowed to suffer merely that peace might remain to that simple mountain home? For, did not the Leech Club

govern a great State, and aspire to the government of a great nation? And could they be expected to turn aside from the path of empire merely to avoid stepping on and crushing out a few hearts?

It was late in the afternoon of the day of the funeral, when a kind neighbor, by the direction of John, came and took the cattle, and other animals of the forsaken household, and drove them to his own premises to be cared for. The furniture was also removed from the house, the hay from the barn; and so the desolation was complete. John, indeed, had large hopes, but the prospects of their ultimate fulfillment were incomparably small. How is he to escape the ban under which he stands, not daring to show himself where he is known? How is he to vindicate his honor by proving a conspiracy against the powerful Leech Club, who boast that they own the courts? And, until he can do this, he must stand in public estimation as a convicted felon.

CHAPTER XIX.

JOHN WOODMAN FINDS COMPANIONSHIP IN THE MOUNTAIN SOLITUDES.

AFTER the burial of his mother, John Woodman returned to his secure hiding place. Though he had books with which to divert himself, the gloom of his situation was becoming terrible. He was occasionally visited by the Hermit of the Catskills, but that strange personage manifested no desire for companionship; and consequently the awe of his presence was oppressive rather than companionable to John. Where the Hermit resided, John had no idea. His visits to John were unannounced, and tarrying briefly, he disappeared in the vastness of the mountain solitudes. The only items of his history which he ever confided to John, were that his Indian ancestors once resided in these mountains;

that he was spending a time among the graves of his fathers, holding sweet communion with their spirits; and that, when this was concluded, he would return to his brethren in the West, whence he came. It was evident that he had means of knowing what was going on, not only in the vicinity, but also in the country and the world at large, for he was well informed respecting all the events and affairs of the day. It was also apparent that he was one of the few of his race who had received a liberal education. He was versed in the lore of the pale faces, and in the cunning and skill of the red children of the forest. Common fame said that, in addition to these qualifications, he was also gifted with a proficiency in the arts of the spirit world; but this is a matter that we leave the reader to decide, if he can. At all events, the Hermit's education in both the ways of the civilized and the savage state of society, rendered him more than a match for any mortal whom he met in these mountains.

John began to feel that a mysterious influence brooded over the mountains, and that every one who remained long within these deep solitudes was under the dominion of a spell; that he was on the confines of two worlds; that this was a common trysting ground, where spirits from the unknown country beyond the clouds were privileged to make themselves known in a slight degree, and hold a restricted converse with those who had not yet passed the boundary between the material and the immaterial universe. John imagined that he saw shades other than those of the forest, flitting like gossamer through the air. He believed that he heard voices other than those of the winds sighing among the branches of the trees. He felt that, should he remain much longer alone in these solitudes, with no human being to attract his attention, he would soon, from the very force of circumstances, become so familiar with these dim apparitions and unintelligible voices as to see them plainly and converse with them freely and understandingly. He became alarmed at this idea, for he had no desire to become so different from ordinary mortals as to be conversant with supernatural things.

When the dreariness of his abode in the forest had be-

come so great that he felt he could no longer endure it, and that penal imprisonment would be preferable, he received a visit from the Hermit, who addressed him in brief terms:

"Come with me, and see more wickedness of the Leech Club!"

John was really rejoiced at this summons. Anything was welcome to him as a change. He had no idea where the Hermit proposed to lead him. Perhaps to a reconnoissance of the castle! Perhaps to the neighborhood of his deserted home? It was enough that he was to have a respite from this oppressive solitude, and he followed joyously.

The Hermit led him over the trackless mountains, John knew not whither. He was certain that he had never traversed this part of the rugged wilderness before. When he halted, it was before a high ledge of rocks. The Hermit procured a wooden lever, and placed the end of it under a flat boulder, which lay in an inclined position among a promiscuous heap of *debris*. Raising this boulder, he propped it up with stones until there was an opening two or three feet wide. He then directed John to look underneath. He did so, and discovered a subterraneous opening, large enough for a man to enter by crawling on his hands and knees.

The Hermit took from the haversack which he generally carried, materials with which he made two torches. Lighting them, he gave one to John, and, telling him to follow, crept into the low, narrow passage. John followed unhesitatingly, glad to embark in any adventure that would divert his present gloomy state of mind. They soon came to a wider and higher passage, where they could stand erect, and it was not long ere they were in a high and spacious cavern. This was undoubtedly the identical one with which the reader has already been made somewhat acquainted.

The Hermit threaded its intricate windings as familiarly as if he had been in the open forest, and John followed, not knowing, or hardly caring what was their errand within this gloomy vault. He had become so depressed with the loneliness of his home in the forest, that even this change to what most persons would have

thought an infinitely more gloomy situation, was a great relief to him. The weird shadows which he saw in the cavern were much less terrifying to him than the uncertain shades with which the forest appeared to him to be invested. And the sepulchral echoes of the doleful vault sounded not half so supernatural to him as the indescribable whisperings that sighed through the trees and gorges in the lonely forest-depths of the mountains.

The Hermit at length stopped at a point where the walls of the cavern appeared to be about the same as elsewhere. They were, however, jagged, and he easily found a foothold to ascend the wall. He commenced climbing up, and John implicitly followed. They climbed up twelve or fifteen feet, and when near the ceiling, found a lateral aperture, which could not be seen from the floor of the cavern, owing to the fact that a crag jutted out in front of it. It was but little more than large enough to admit their bodies, and into it they crept. They soon emerged into a spacious apartment.

The Hermit halted, and told John to look ahead. John at first could see nothing but the ghastly shadows cast by the light of their own torches. But as his vision became more concentrated, he began to comprehend that there were other lights than theirs in the farther end of the chamber. Dimly as lamps in sepulchres these lights flickered athwart the darkness. Many were the reflections that rushed through John's mind as he viewed these uncertain rays, appearing like the phantom light of an ignis fatuus. Did they proceed from the lanterns of some of the Hermit's weird associates? Was he at last admitted to the innermost chamber of the Hermit's mysterious habitation? Was he to be admitted into mysteries which he had dreaded, and from which he had shrank in the forest? Verily it seemed to him that this was a fitting home for spirits, here in the rocky depths, with mountains piled above them! Perhaps a conclave of the ghostly denizens of the Catskills was to be held, to take into consideration the best means to checkmate the wicked designs of the Leech Club! Perhaps John's late lonely residence in the mountains was the probation to which the Hermit assigned him, that he might be prepared for initiation into the secrets of the supernat-

ural agencies which seemed to sway an unseen but powerful influence on the affairs of that region! Such were the thoughts which crowded upon John's mind. As has been intimated, he shrank from the idea of holding supernatural knowledge beyond that of ordinary mortals, and he began to regret that he had accompanied the Hermit into this awful cavern.

After a brief pause, the Hermit, motioning John to remain where he was, went forward to the part of the chamber where the lights were seen. Soon the summons came from the Hermit:

"Advance now, and see the new evidence of the wickedness of the Leech Club, which I promised to show you!"

John felt that he had received a summons to step from the bounds of mortal knowledge into a circle where the arcana of another world was about to be revealed to him. He hesitated for a moment. He was not yet ready to give up the mortal for the immortal. Perhaps this step would metamorphose him into such a being as the Hermit of the Catskills, who appeared to care little for earthly things! John did not care to become so different from his fellow-mortals as to take no pleasure in earthly joys, and be amenable to earthly sorrows. He thought of Phebe Greenwood, and wondered if his initiation into supernatural mysteries would render him indifferent to her charms. Would she not dread and shun him, should he become an agent of these mysteries?

But John had no time to ponder on, and arrange these doubtful reflections. There was no chance now for retreat, and he must go forward if these few steps led him into a transformation from a mortal being into one who should partake of both the natures of the supernal and the corporeal world. As he drew near, doubt changed into astonishment. Instead of a circle of mystic beings, arising in impalpable forms from the floor of the cavern, there sat, on rude stools, two frail women. Near at hand were a few cooking utensils, and at a little distance off might be discerned a couple of couches, showing that these females must be domiciled here for the present. John at first looked on only in blank amazement. But

when all the lurid torches were made to concentrate their light on the group, and John began to distinguish the features of the females, he exclaimed in a transport of astonishment:

“Good Heavens! Is this Susan Clarkson?”

“Yes, John!”

This reply was made in tones so sad and sepulchral that he was in doubt whether it was really a mortal or a disembodied spirit that addressed him. The words of the Hermit, telling him to come and see new evidence of the Leech Club’s cruelty, flashed upon his mind, and he actually thought these women had probably been murdered, and that these were their spirits conjured up by the Hermit.

“Indeed, Susan,” said John, “is it really yourself, or do I but behold the shade, the ghost of what was the Susan Clarkson that I knew before the Leech Club made me a fugitive in the solitude of these mountains?”

“It is me, John, and no mistake; though I wish I was the ghost that you seem to think me! Then the shame of my life could not longer bring a blush to my cheek, for a spirit, John, has no blood to spring up into the face, as a tell-tale of shame!”

“But, pardon me, Susan, I must grasp your hand before I can really believe that you are flesh and blood. The mysterious influences of these mountains have so unsettled my thoughts with doubts, that I hardly know whether I am in a real, or an unreal, shadowy world!”

“I don’t wonder, John,” said she, “for this lady and myself have seen some strange sights, and heard strange sounds since we have been in this cave!”

“There seem to be little else but strange sights and sounds in these mountains since I have had to make my home in the woods,” said John. “It was not so before the Leech Club established themselves here. It must be that their wickedness has called up spirits from the grave to punish them.”

“I know your story, John,” said Susan. “Our good friend, the Hermit of the Catskills, has told us. You have suffered by this wicked Leech Club as well as me. And so has this poor lady here.”

“Do tell me how it is that they have gotten you into this horrible place, Susan!”

"It is rather hard, John, for me to repeat the story of my own shame; but here in this awful dungeon, that seems to me more like the pit of condemned sinners than a habitation for mortals, I feel as though I am as good as dead and brought to judgment; and I can confess my sins like one who is confessing in another world. Here with nothing but the faint light of these torches shining on me, the blush of shame will not be so plain on my face, and I will tell you all, John.

"That same Mr. Sindandy, John, who has caused all your trouble, and hurried your mother to the grave, has brought me to this. While he was staying at Mr. Shoeman's, I got acquainted with him, and he visited our house several times. He invited me to ride with him in his buggy; and what girl in the neighborhood would have refused to go out in such a fine carriage? I see now how foolish I was, but it is too late. He said he wanted an innocent country girl for a wife, and that I just suited him. How silly I was to listen to his talk, but I did not know it then. He said he was only making a visit at Mr. Shoeman's, and that he was not paying attention to Mary Shoeman. At last he persuaded me to go with him to the city, and get married secretly. He said he had reasons for keeping it secret for awhile. I made an excuse to father and mother that I was going to visit a friend not many miles distant, and that I would be away all night. Mr. Sindandy met me a short distance from home, and soon we were on our way to the city. When we got there, to make sure that all was right, I would consent to be married nowhere but in a church. He got a carriage, and we were taken to a church. He sent the coachman for a minister, and we were married.

"The next day we came back home. Soon I found he was very thick with Mary Shoeman. He did not call to see me at my father's house any more, but appointed places where we met secretly in the evening. I asked him why he paid so much attention to Mary Shoeman, but he said it meant nothing at all; that as he was staying at her house, he had to be polite to her. Soon it was noised around that he and Miss Shoeman were going to be married. I taxed him with these stories, but at first he would give me no satisfaction. At last it was known that there

was a great dressmaker at Mr. Shoeman's making Mary's wedding clothes. I told him that I would stand this no longer, that I would expose him and let the people know that he was married to me.

"Then, John, what do you think he told me! Why, he said that he was not married to me at all, and asked me to show my marriage certificate. He said that the man who married us was not a minister, but only a bartender in a saloon, that he had sent the coachman after. He said he had got the church key of the sexton, on an excuse that he wanted to go in after some books. Then he told me that all I had to do was to keep quiet, and he would see that I was well taken care of; that I should have a fine house to live in in the city, but that I could not be his wife.

"When I heard this I felt as though I wanted to call the lightning from the clouds to strike us both dead. I did not want to live after such disgrace. I screamed and fainted, and when I came to, he was sprinkling me with water from a spring close by. As I looked at him, I hated the sight of him, as if he had been a child of Satan, as I believe he is. I believe, in the wickedness of my heart, John, if I had had the means, I would have killed him on the spot, and myself too. I screamed at him to begone, and never come near me again. I told him that I would go straight and expose him. He tried to pacify me, but I screamed, and ordered him away in such a loud voice that he began to fear that some one would come along, and he left, telling me that I might as well keep quiet, for no one would believe my story if I told it.

"As soon as he was gone, I was about to start for home, when out of the bushes stepped my good friend, the Hermit here, who had heard the whole thing. At first I was frightened, but he behaved so kindly that I stopped to hear what he had to say. He advised me to say nothing about the outrageous treatment I had received from Mr. Sindandy; for he said I had no proof, and it would be hard to make people believe my story. The Hermit said that when the day of the wedding came, he would go with me to the city, and that we would forbid the ceremony in the church.

"We did this, John, but no good came of it. I was

taken from the church by a policeman, and taken to a house where I was at first kindly treated; and I at first thought I was in the hands of a lady. But I soon found that it was an awful house, John. The women were bad, and they wanted me to be one of their number. Mrs. Grandola, who passes for a great lady in the Leech Club, used to come there, and she was as bad as the rest. I was told that she used to keep that house herself, until she got in with the Leech Club; and then her new friends thought she had better give it up for appearance's sake. I often saw members of the Leech Club there.

"When I found out what kind of a house it was, my only thought was to escape from it. One day I managed to get into the street, and I ran for several blocks, and turned two or three corners. I then thought I was safe, and began to walk slower. I had not gone far till a policeman stepped up behind me and patted me on the shoulder. 'You must come with me,' said he, and he took me by the arm, and led me two or three blocks. He then ordered a carriage, put me into it, got in himself, and the driver drove to a distant part of the city. I was kept at a house till night, when the policeman ordered another carriage, and I was taken to the cars. Soon I fell asleep, and I think some kind of a drug must have been put in my tea at the house, for I did not awake again till the policeman aroused me to get off the cars.

"I was then put into a carriage, and when daylight came, I found myself in these mountains. The carriage drove into the mountains as far as it could, and then I had to walk. Finally I was blindfolded, and when the bandage was taken from my eyes, I found myself in this cave, but not in the apartment where we are now.

"There is a great gulf in this cave, John, that has high walls, where one cannot get out. Into this I was put in a small room, where there was a bed, and a few cooking fixtures. This lady was put in at the same time. We were allowed a couple of lamps, and a little charcoal to make our tea. A couple of men visited us every day to furnish us with provisions. We used to hear noises in other parts of the cave, and we sometimes thought that others were imprisoned there by the Leech Club, the same as us. But we did not dare to search around, for

the men told us there were deep chasms everywhere, and that we would fall in them and be dashed to pieces.

"One day, John, you may know how glad I was when the Hermit of the Catskills made us a visit. This lady was greatly frightened, but I told her that the Hermit was my friend. He brought us to this room, and here we have been ever since. The men who were our jailors cannot find us here, and we are at least free from the Leech Club at present.

"This lady, John, is another victim of these wicked people. Her step-father, Mr. Swellup, wanted her to marry a man that she despised. Besides she is engaged to another gentleman. Finding that he could not compel her to marry this man, Mr. Swellup had her imprisoned in this cave, and she was brought here the same day I was. We have been in the cave about three weeks, but the last week we have been in this apartment under the care of the kind Hermit.

"We expect, with the aid of our good friend, to make our escape from here soon; but the Hermit says that the mountains about here are closely watched at present. This is the whole story, John."

"And a wonderful one it is," said John, "of cruelty, treachery, nay, incarnate deviltry! Verily this cave is the bottomless pit, Mr. Swellup is the Beelzebub of it, and his crew are the imps of torture!"

"John, I hope you won't leave us till we are all able to escape from this terrible place. It is so fearfully lonely and doleful here!"

"No," said John, "I will not desert you, for I know our good friend, the Hermit, will permit me to remain."

"Yes," said the Hermit, "he shall remain with you till I find you all a more congenial dwelling."

A couch was prepared for John in a nook of the cavernous chamber, the Hermit procured some books, and the three fugitives tried to make life endurable in this subterranean Hades. Their cooking was done by a scanty charcoal fire in a crevice of the rock, the gas escaping through a seam, and so causing them no detriment. And now we must leave them for a while to amuse themselves as best they can, by converse among themselves, or

communion with the spirits of the mountain, who, they verily believed, made this cave their headquarters.

CHAPTER XX.

CROSS PURPOSES.

A few days after the events related in the preceding chapter, three men with guns and haversacks left the castle of the Leech Club, accompanied by a large dog, as if for a hunting excursion in the mountains. Two of them the reader has already been made well acquainted with—Horace Lackfathe and Mr. Graphic. The other was a stout mountaineer, called Joe, whom the other two had engaged as a guide and assistant.

They pursued very much the course which they had once before traversed, in going to the wild gorge, where they had encountered the Hermit of the Catskills. They again entered this gloomy, but grand and picturesque valley. The waters of the boisterous creek still roared in furious cascades down the dell; the magnificent trees still shut out the light of the sun, or only let it in in the most diminutive specks, and these sifted through the thick foliage as a screen, so that all the real richness of sunlight seemed to be strained off, and they appeared on the dim carpet as spots of skim-milk fallen down from the bright sky overhead; the rocks were as somber as ever; no singing birds enlivened the gloom; the only sounds heard save the rushing of the noisy creek, were the peck, peck, peck, of the woodpecker on the bark of the enormous trunks of the trees, and the occasional weak notes of that bird, so faint as to cause the thought that the deep shade must have had the same depressing effect on the development of its voice, as upon the growth of the sickly looking brakes and grasses which grew among the overshadowing forest.

The three men first repaired to the hut or grotto which Horace and Mr. Graphic had prepared for their habitation during their former visit. Strange to say, they found nothing disturbed. The blankets and other articles were

just as they had left them, and they were consequently saved the trouble of providing a lodging place.

They next prepared angling rods, and again tried the frolicsome trout. These they found as unsuspicious as ever, and they soon had enough of them for a sumptuous meal. Having prepared and partaken of a repast, they next visited the spot where they had entered the wonderful cavern in which they had had such strange and almost fatal adventures. To their surprise they found no traces of an opening in the rocks. There was a pile of *debris*, the same as before, but the boulder which they had removed to gain an entrance into the cavern, had evidently been, by some agency, replaced. If they could only tell which one it was, they might remove it again; but in a promiscuous pile of boulders, this was almost impossible. They could only look carefully among the boulders for any scratches that might have been received by the one they were seeking, in the process of raising. After a patient search, they found some slight indications such as they were seeking, and also judging from the shape of the boulder, concluded it was the right one. Getting a wooden lever, they succeeded in raising it, and were not disappointed. A passage was found underneath.

They then returned to their grotto, to make all due preparations for entering this great repository of terrors the next day. It was evident that some mortal or supernatural being had been in the valley since their last visit, for the entrance to the cavern could not have been so completely closed without some such agency. They were not disturbed through the night, as on the previous visit, but were allowed a refreshing repose.

The reader has doubtless guessed that they were in quest of Charity Faithful, as Horace was aware that her step-father had threatened to imprison her in this cave unless she complied with his wishes that she should marry a certain member of the Leech Club. Such, indeed, was the errand of these men. They were resolved again to brave the terrors of this subterranean Pandemonium in order to rescue the unfortunate lady whom they believed to be confined within its dark, Plutonian precincts.

Early in the morning they were astir, preparing their breakfast. With haversacks well filled with provisions,

canteens of water, and an extra supply of oil for their torches, they set out upon their expedition. It was with great difficulty that they crawled into the narrow passage, encumbered with their guns and other accouterments. The dog was shoved ahead, lest he might hesitate to follow. Having reached the expanding cavern, they determined to make such marks in their path that they could not miss their way out. This they did by piling up little mounds of pebbles not more than a rod apart.

They had proceeded far enough to reach the gulf into which Horace had fallen during their former visit, and were surprised that they saw nothing of it. They must have gotten into another ramification of the cave. But they kept on, sometimes through narrow passages, sometimes through broad and lofty chambers, sometimes leaping over chasms; but never failing to mark their path-way by little piles of *debris*. They certainly have an almost hopeless task before them; for how are they ever to explore all the ramifications of this subterranean labyrinth? And those whom they seek may be confined in some secret nook, the entrance to which is concealed. But they falter not in their mission of mercy, pressing forward through all difficulties.

Leaving them to pursue their arduous way, we will observe what is going on in another part of the cavern. In the chamber where we left John Woodman and his companions, there is an evident preparation to evacuate. The women have their heads covered with hoods, and their dresses tucked up so as not to impede their walking. John Woodman is apparently gathering a few necessary articles into his haversack. The Hermit stands erect in his full traveling costume, a short distance off, surveying the group. Each one has a torch, and the chamber is more than usually lit up, but the illumination is only sufficient to multiply the ghastly, flickering shadows. John Woodman has apparently finished his preparations, and he approaches the two women as if to inquire whether he can render them any assistance. They all stand gazing at each other for a moment, presenting a weird tableau. The three suddenly start up at the voice of the Hermit, as if the rocks had spoken; so deep and dismal sounded

his utterance as it was echoed back from the shadowy walls.

"We are about to embark in an undertaking that may be attended with much difficulty. I am quite sure that the way is clear in the direction in which I shall lead you. The agents of the Leech Club are watching in another part of the cavern, and if I get you out in the place I have in view, you will be safe. Much depends on your presence of mind. You may see sights in this cavern that will chill your blood, but don't give way to any foolish fear. If there is any real danger, I will give you warning, and indicate to you what course to pursue. But so long as I give you no sign, be assured that there is no danger; and no matter what else you hear or see, utter no word nor cry, and falter not. Follow carefully in my footsteps, else you may plunge into an abyss from which there will be no rising till the day of judgment. Be brave! be firm! be calm! be steady! and all will be well. Let us go hence!"

The two women fairly trembled at the words of the Hermit, and had he not started at once without giving them time for thought, they would have faltered. But as he stalked away toward the entrance of the chamber, they could do nothing but follow; and so they regained their courage. They ascended by the craggy steps to the opening near the ceiling, crept through, and descended on the other side. They were then in the outer cavern.

Now commenced their doleful march through the gloom made lurid by their torches. They went in single file, each carrying a staff and a torch, the Hermit in front, the two women next, while John Woodman brought up the rear. They marched in close order, the one behind fairly treading in the steps of the one immediately in front. On, on, they stalked, slowly and surely, looking like an ambulance-corps searching over a battle-field of Hades, to gather up disabled spirits who had been placed *hors de combat* in a tilt between opposing forces of war-like goblins. Now they climb over rugged piles of *debris*; now they thread a narrow defile; now they have but barely walking room between the cavern wall on one side and a fathomless chasm on the other; down which a

stone dropped, gives back no sound in indication of its having reached bottom.

The women exhibit remarkable nerve in threading these unknown dangers. But soon there came a trial at which their hearts, and even that of John Woodman, quailed. Just ahead were revealed the figures of men apparently seated on the rocks. They thought they had run into a trap, and would surely be taken. The women halted for fear, and the Hermit not noticing this went on. John dared not utter a word, owing to the Hermit's charge, and he was also obliged to halt. The three were astonished to see the Hermit keep on, regardless of those who seemed to block his way. The women stood still, trembling; and their wonder and their fear was scarcely diminished when, as the Hermit came just opposite the figures, the apparitions dissolved before the light of his torch as if they had been but stereopticon pictures cast upon a screen.

The Hermit, having missed the footsteps behind him, turned around and saw his followers some distance in the rear. As if divining the cause, he retraced his steps. As he did so, the apparitions resumed their places where they had been before. And now the terrors of the situation were immeasurably multiplied, for there arose a medley of discordant voices as if a bedlam of fiends had been let loose.

"I charge you," said the Hermit, "tarry not here, or you are lost!"

Then taking one of the women in his arms, he motioned to John to do the same with the other, and thus the two females were carried through this terrible pass. As John came opposite the apparitions, he saw them dissolve as they had done before. John would have faltered before this array of terrors, had not his philosophy come to his aid. He tried to account in his own mind for the apparitions on the ground of some sort of optical illusion caused by the torches, and for the sounds, on the idea of a concentration of echoes remaining stored in the rocks till they were awakened by the sounds of approaching footsteps. But afterwards, he admitted to himself that such was a very improbable theory; for how could such echoes utter distinct words?

The little company was obliged to come to a short halt, to give the women time to recover from their fright. The beating of their hearts could be distinctly heard, and the ordeal must have been a terrible one to their nerves, unschooled in such adventures. But soon they resumed their march the same as before. They kept on for some time, when again figures were seen ahead. They had now bolstered up their nerves, and had come to the determination to follow the Hermit through everything. What was their surprise, when the Hermit turned, and waved his hand to them to halt! This time it was a real danger instead of a phantom one. Their hearts fairly sank within them as they heard a voice cry out from one of the figures ahead:

“Forward, men, it is she! it is Charity! and she is in the hands of the Hermit of the Catskills!”

The figures ahead pressed forward, but unacquainted with the floor of the cavern, they were stopped by a deep chasm, and they must get around it in some way before they could press upon the Hermit and his party. This gave time to the latter to gain considerable in their retreat.

“Back, back,” said the Hermit to his followers, “or we are lost! I know that man who spoke. He is one of the Leech Club, and I once had an encounter with him.”

The Hermit pressed to the rear, and led his followers backward. Meanwhile their pursuers were groping about to get around the chasm. By the time they had done so, the Hermit had gotten his party some considerable distance off, and being near a jutting rock, they turned this, and were, for the time, out of sight of their pursuers.

“Quick,” said the Hermit, “here is a crevice in the rock where the women can hide. Their dark dresses will look just like a part of the rock. In, in, quick! Now, young man, you and I will take all four of the torches, and keep them in sight, so that the pursuers will be drawn after us. They will think we are all together. We will lead them off to another part of the cavern, and then return for the women!”

The ruse succeeded. The pursuers followed the Hermit and John, and in doing so, passed within three feet

of where the two females were hid in a crevice of the rock.

The Hermit led off in a tortuous course, and was fast distancing the pursuers, for they knew not the ground so well. But, finally a danger beset the Hermit and John on the other hand; for torches appeared glimmering through the darkness in the line of their retreat. They were evidently assailed both in front and rear by hostile forces. The Hermit seemed astonished that the forces of the Leech Club had so overreached him, as to get him surrounded. He had, before embarking in this enterprise, assured himself that the only force the Club had in the cavern was the one, probably, which was now cutting off his retreat. He had made no calculations respecting the force which had first obstructed the escape of him and his followers.

The two forces were fast closing upon the devoted Hermit and his friend, and there was no way of escape. At length the Hermit, coming to a chasin somewhat sunken below the floor of the cavern, said :

"This is probably the best place we will find. We must take our stand in this chasm and fight our pursuers. Get your revolver ready. We will conceal our lights under this rock, so they cannot tell exactly where we are. We can fire on them by their own torches. Don't fire till I give you the word. I will only fire to wound at first. Perhaps we can frighten them off without taking life."

The Hermit then drew forth his bow and arrows, and he and John crouched down into the chasm. It was not long before the party which first headed them off, came up, while the party which cut off their retreat were still some distance off. The Hermit drew an arrow to the head, and with unerring aim sent it through the blaze of one of the torches of the first party, snuffing it completely out. This brought them to a halt, and John heard one of them exclaim :

"There, that red devil of an Indian is firing arrows at us ! Level your pieces, men, take good aim, and fire !"

They were armed with rifles, and instantly each man brought his piece to his shoulder, and after a deliberate aim, the cavern resounded with the deafening echoes of

the discharge. To the surprise of the Hermit and John, a cry of pain and rage came from the party which was approaching in their rear, and who had cut off their retreat.

"Good," whispered the Hermit, "they think the arrow came from the other party! They have mistaken them for us. Our enemies, through a fortunate mistake, are fighting each other. Let them exterminate each other, if they will. It will spare our hands the responsibility of their blood!"

"I could cover one of our near assailants nicely with my revolver," said John.

"But why should you do so?" said the Hermit. "It would be like disabling one of our own forces; for even though they do it unwittingly, they are in a fair way to annihilate our enemies in the rear."

"Oh! I have no thought of doing it," said John. "I was only thinking how completely the fellow is at my mercy."

It was evident that some of the party in the rear were hit, though not disabled. They were armed with pistols, and instantly poured forth a volley at the first party. They were at least three to one, and the bullets rained about on the rocks like hail. But they were too far off to take sure aim with pistols, and it was evident that the first party had distracted their aim by holding their torches away from their bodies, and not one of them was hurt.

The second party, now with yells and imprecations, came on as fast as they could without incurring the risk of falling into chasms, evidently intending to come to close quarters and bring their superior numbers to bear, before the first party could again load their pieces. The first party seeing this movement, sought cover in the shallow chasm only a short distance from the Hermit and John, but separated from them by a jutting crag. Here was a situation to try the nerve of John and his friend, for their assailants were only a few feet off, and should they move down the chasm, could not help but discover them.

The party who had taken refuge in the chasm, instantly loaded their pieces, and again leveled them at the ad-

vancing squadron, and fired. This time the second party had apparently also adopted the ruse of holding their torches off from their persons, and they suffered no harm except the snuffing out of one or two of their torches. With shouts of derision and defiance, they pressed forward, and as they were getting very close, the first party were obliged to move their quarters, or be overpowered by the superior numbers of the other. Fortunately for John and the Hermit, they moved up the chasm. Concealing the light of their torches by an apparatus fixed for the purpose, the retreating party crept up the chasm till they came to a jutting crag which afforded them a slight cover. Here they again loaded their pieces, and awaited the approach of the other party. The latter advanced and entered the chasm. No sooner had they done so than they received a volley from their opponents, and some of them were hit. This revealed the whereabouts of the first party, and their pursuers now dashed forward to close in with them. The first party were consequently obliged to display their torches, and beat a hasty retreat in order to escape the superior numbers of their assailants. This drew upon them a discharge of revolvers from the latter, which, however, did not arrest their flight.

The din created by this conflict was fearful and indescribable. The discharge of firearms was re-echoed from a thousand chambers, crevices and recesses, and the shouts of the combatants resounded as if legions of fiends had sprung up in every quarter of the vast cavern to join in the infernal combat. Most varied and inscrutable were the echoes. Sometimes the report of the firearms would sound like a long roll, as if an immense ball were ricochetting off into the innermost bowels of the mountains. Anon the echoes would come quick and sharp, as if there had been discharges of firearms on every side, and from the roof overhead. The echoes of the shouts also presented a multiplicity of phases. Sometimes they would sound loud and terrible like the command of a Titan of the cavern. Again they would sound like the wail of tortured spirits. Then there would come a concentration of defiant, echoing yells, as

if two opposing legions of spirits were tilting at each other in vociferous conflict.

The first party finally retreated back over the same path, down which they had pursued the Hermit and his friends. They seemed to know the path over which they had trodden, and thus they were able to pick their way, while keeping their torches mostly obscured. This gave them an advantage over their more numerous pursuers, for the latter could seldom tell in what direction to aim their pistols at the retreating party. The pursuers, on the contrary, were obliged to keep their torches constantly burning, in order to light their path, and the fugitives constantly delivered their fire upon their antagonists. While the aim must be uncertain in the darkness, owing to the expedient of holding the torch away from the body, thus necessitating the aim to be in a great measure by guess, it was evident that several of the pursuers were hit, though not seriously wounded. They continued the pursuit, shouting, cursing, firing at random, and receiving the fire of the retreating party. Thus the gloomy cavern was literally, turned into a Pandemonium, the terrors of which must have approximated those of the real Hades.

The Hermit and John Woodman were in this singular manner relieved from the attacks of the two parties which at one time seemed to be both closing upon them to their certain destruction. The Hermit believed both of these parties to be connected with the Leech Club, and to be in pursuit of the two unfortunate females who had escaped from their custody. And the Hermit firmly believed that these two parties, by a happy blunder, had become involved with each other, while they were really friendly to each other if they had only known it; and that he and his friend had thus escaped their attacks.

Leaving John and the Hermit, we will return to the point where the two females were left concealed. After the immediate danger was passed, they came out from their hiding place, and sat down in the darkness together, clasped in each other's arms. It was a terrible situation. They were there without light, or knowledge of the subterranean dungeon, not knowing but

mishap might befall their protectors, and that they would thus be left to perish miserably in the awful cavern. Even with lights, they could have no hope of extricating themselves, unaided, from this subterranean dungeon. In the darkness, they probably could not move two rods without being dashed to pieces down some deep chasm.

"This," said Charity, "is more terrible than anything we have yet experienced!"

"It is, indeed!" said Susan. "What if John and the Hermit should get killed and never come back?"

"I dare not contemplate such a thing!" said Charity.

"How terrible it sounded to hear that man shout out, 'Forward, men, it is Charity!' How they would have dragged us away if they had got us!"

"It frightened me terribly, Susan. And yet that voice sounded strangely familiar to me. It sounded like Horace Lackfathe. And yet I know it could not be he, for he would not cherish such enmity against our good friend, the Hermit."

As Charity concluded the last sentence, both the women uttered a piercing scream.

"Oh! Lord! what was that?" they both ejaculated in a breath.

Roll after roll, shout after shout, yell after yell, echoed through the cavern.

"The Lord preserve us!" said Charity, "they are fighting! Those are the reports of firearms!"

"Oh! dear Lord! dear Lord!" cried Susan, "they will get killed and we will be left to die and moulder here in the cave!"

"Be calm, Susan! Let us kneel and pray for them and ourselves. Why should we fear death? Even the slow starvation and wasting that we must endure can be hardly worse than the trials we have passed through during the last few weeks. If it is the Lord's will, why should we repine?"

And that trusting woman drew her companion closer to her, both kneeling upon the cold rocks, while she poured forth her fervent soul in a brief, resigning and touching petition. And while she prayed, the distant contest in the cavern grew louder, more terrific and dis-

cordant. It verily seemed as if a prayer had been uttered upon the threshold of hell, and that howling demons were trying to drown it with their fiendish discord.

As the two helpless women arose from their knees, they seemed to be invested with new courage. They sat mute upon the rock, awaiting their doom with calm resignation. Soon the conflict appeared to be approaching them, while it diminished not in terror. Now they see lights coming toward them, while the din of firearms, and shouts and curses, are constantly echoed from the sepulchral walls. It is the retreating party and their pursuers drawing near. The two women again conceal themselves in the crevice of the rock. The retreating party come up; and the women at first think that it is John and the Hermit driven by their enemies. Just as the retreating party get opposite where the two women are concealed, they halt. They are so near that Charity could actually reach one of them with her hand. But she sees that there are three of them, and so concludes that they are not her friends, and she crouches close in the crevice. Instantly they bring their pieces to their shoulders. Three lurid blazes flash from the muzzles, and three deafening reports sound through the empty cavern; followed by yells and curses from their pursuers. The three then stalk on through the darkness, with muffled torches. The two women could not suppress a slight scream when this discharge of firearms took place so near them, but the cry was entirely drowned by the deafening echoes.

The other party soon come up. There are nine or ten of them. They pass, and finally disappear; but the conflict is still kept up, as is evident from the rolling echoes. The women again come forth, and become seated on the rock.

"Oh! my God!" said Susan, "they have gone on, and left us here to die!"

"It does, indeed, appear so, my poor friend!" said Charity. "And still I can hardly think that John and the Hermit were in either of those parties. As true as I live there were three in the first party, and nine or ten in the second. The second party were certainly not our

friends, and if the first were, then they must have had one added to their number."

"Then, where can John and the Hermit be?" moaned Susan.

"That is something that we cannot know. Perhaps dead! We may as well look our situation fully in the face, Susan," said Charity, sadly.

"Oh! dear! Oh! dear! that we should be left to die like worms and bleach on these rocks, to be eaten, may be, by rats and other filthy animals! And no one will ever know where our bodies are!"

"Though our bodies be buried here a thousand feet beneath the mountain tops, with millions of tons of rock between them and the bright blue sky, our souls cannot be borne down by all this great weight. They will rise as freely as if no hard, cold rocks intervened, and mount to a region where light reigns as supremely as thick darkness does here!"

"But only think of our poor bodies being left in this black place, that seems to be the kingdom of Satan!"

"It is no darker here than the grave, Susan; although it may seem so to us who are alive; while the dead are no longer susceptible to darkness, for their souls are set free, and are not confined beneath the thick clay. Our bodies can receive no worse treatment here than beneath the clods of the churchyard. Think you, that the worms of the earth are more merciful to the bodies of the dead than any animal that may exist in this cavern?"

"Oh! no, I suppose not; but it is so horrible to think of dying here by inches, of starvation, and then to have our bodies left here where none will know of them, and no friend can ever visit our graves!"

"No matter where our bodies lie, our souls will find them at the resurrection. And ought we not rather, Susan, to give more concern to the welfare of our souls than to these tenements of clay that may soon be as senseless as the cold rock upon which we sit?"

"True, true, my good friend. How wise and full of faith you are. I begin to think I am even fortunate to be brought here to die a slow death in this horrible place, since I can have one so good to teach me the way to God and to Heaven!"

"See, see, Susan, there are lights coming! Shall we get again into our hiding place, or remain here to be taken by either friend or foe?"

"Perhaps we had better remain where we can be seen. If they are friends, we will be rescued. If foes, we can throw ourselves on their mercy. Surely, they cannot, if they are men, harm two defenseless women!"

"Ah! 'if they are men!' that is well put in. The Leech Club is not composed of men. And as for throwing ourselves on their mercy! they know no such thing! I might have my doubts as to our justification in remaining here, and thus incur the appearance of taking our own lives. But I think it would be fully as much like suicide to throw ourselves into the hands of the Leech Club. Let us hide!"

They again took refuge in the crevice in the rock. But fortunately those they saw coming were John and the Hermit. They had waited till the contending parties had gotten well out of sight beyond the point where the females were concealed, when they started to the relief of the latter. As they came along they saw spots of blood on the rocks, from which it was evident that wounds had been inflicted in the fight.

We will not attempt to describe the joy of the females at the meeting with their protectors. But there was little time to spend in congratulations.

"Come, come," said the Hermit, "we must get back to the chamber whence we came. Our attempt to escape is foiled for this time. Our enemies, by a mistake fortunate for us, got to fighting with each other. They will quite likely discover their blunder after a while; then they will all return together to hunt us. I cannot see how I made such a wrong calculation in supposing the cavern clear in the direction in which we set out. But there is no remedy now but to go back to our hiding-place, and attempt our escape again on some more favorable opportunity."

The party immediately set out on their return to the secret chamber, from which they had started some hours before with a good prospect of escape from their gloomy abode. After a laborious march they reached it without any further mishap.

Having thus secured his wards, the Hermit returned to the outer cavern, to reconnoiter. He was so well acquainted with the nooks of the cavern that he would have no difficulty in keeping out of the way of any parties who might be prowling about. Taking a favorable stand, he waited patiently for developments. At length he saw the larger party of combatants return. They carried three of their men on stretchers, made of blankets, whether dead or seriously wounded, the Hermit could not tell. Nearly every one of the party seemed to have been hit, and all appeared very much exhausted. After they got out of sight, the Hermit returned to his friends in the secret chamber.

It was a most remarkable contretemps which defeated the Hermit's well-laid plans for the escape of his friends.

We will return to the party of Horace Lackfathe, which entered the cavern from the wild valley. They proceeded without any remarkable mishap until they, as the reader has doubtless surmised, encountered the Hermit and the prisoners endeavoring to escape from the cavern. Horace recognized Charity Faithful, and also the Hermit of the Catskills. Having met the latter on other occasions, under such remarkable circumstances, he naturally looked upon the Hermit as an enemy. Seeing Charity with him, he supposed that she was held as a prisoner by the Hermit, whom he now viewed as an undoubted agent of the Leech Club. Consequently, when he met his party, he instantly exhorted his comrades to rush forward to the rescue of Charity Faithful.

The Hermit's acquaintance with Horace had also been of a nature to induce the belief that he was an enemy, and a member of the Leech Club.

Thus by this fatal mistake were the common plans of both defeated. Both were aiming to accomplish the same beneficent purpose; each mistook the other for an enemy, while both had the utmost reason for mutual friendship, if they had only known it. How the two parties would have rushed into each other's arms, if they had only been aware of each other's true errand! When Horace and his friends passed the place where the two women were concealed, he was almost within arm's

length of Charity, whom he would have given worlds to release from her terrible situation.

But in this dark drama of errors there was one happy mistake. Horace and his party were spared the painful mistake of fighting the Hermit and John Woodman, who were their friends, without being aware of it. As will be recollected, when Horace and his party reached the spot where the Hermit and John were concealed, there appeared upon the dark scene another and larger party. These were real enemies, and agents of the Leech Club; and with them Horace and his party, by a most fortunate mistake, became engaged. With these they carried on a conflict which, in the strangeness of its field, appeared like the warring of fiends in the infernal realms of darkness.

And the Hermit and John looked upon this fight as one in which they had no part or lot—as the contention of two parties of the Leech Club, who had become involved with each other by mistake.

Had the Hermit and John only known that one party was really their friends, and the other their enemies, how gladly would they have joined forces with Horace and his two companions. And the two parties, combined, would doubtless have defeated the Leech Club force, and thus Charity Faithful and the other fugitives would have been released from the cavern.

When Horace's party was compelled to retreat back before the superior Leech Club party, he again passed within arm's length of the one whom he sought, and he could then easily have rescued her and her female companion, if he had only been aware of their presence. And thus, while these poor women were crouching in despair in the crevice of the rock, they were unconsciously hiding from the friends who were seeking them, with hearts aching at their failure. While the helpless females were contemplating in bitter agony the prospect of laying their bodies down to waste slowly away with hunger, and bleach on the rocks, aid was within arm's length of them, rescuers were right at hand, and they did not know it.

Horace Lackfathe and his two friends continued their retreat till they entered the narrow defile a short distance

from their place of egress from the cave. Here they thought it best to make a stand and beat back the Leech Club party, lest the latter might interfere with their escape. They gathered some loose stones, and hastily threw up a low breastwork across the narrow pass. Their pursuers would have no chance in the narrow defile to elude their fire, and they had no doubt of an easy victory. And they reckoned rightly, for by getting the range of the passage, they were able to fire, even in the darkness, with a pretty good prospect of hitting any one in it. Their pursuers came up, and pressed on with the same determination as ever; but a few shots from Horace and his friends stretched three of their number severely wounded on the floor of the passage. Carrying their wounded out to the wider part of the cave, they were glad to get out of reach of that murderous fire. Preparing stretchers from blankets which they carried, for their disabled companions, they retired down the cavern.

Horace and his friends were not long in making their way out of the dungeon into the valley. They placed the boulder back into the entrance, to prevent pursuit, and then repaired to their grotto. It was nearly sundown, and they had been in the cave all day. They had received nothing more than a few mere scratches from pistol bullets, having managed to elude the aim of their adversaries in the darkness. But they were exhausted and dispirited beyond description. They prepared a supper of coffee and such eatables as they had brought with them, and this, in a measure, refreshed their bodies and their spirits.

"Only think, Mr. Graphic," said Horace, "I was within a few yards of Charity! I saw and recognized her as plainly as I do you now! And she was in the custody of that savage Indian, whose infernal arts eluded us! The Lord only knows what is to be her fate!"

"There were two females in the party," said Mr. Graphic. "Whether the other one was another victim of the Leech Club's cruelty, or an agent of theirs, we have no means of knowing. But, at least, there is a slight satisfaction in knowing that she has company of her own sex in that infernal abode.

"True," said Horace, "there is a little comfort in that. And we have established the fact that she is confined in that cave. Our only resource now is to apply to the authorities of the law, expose the villainy of the Leech Club, and get a force that can rescue her!"

"I fear that will not avail us," said Mr. Graphic, shaking his head.

"Why not?"

"You certainly must have observed how easily the Leech Club control the agents of the law for their own purposes. See how they hunted that young man, John Woodman, away from his home when he became obnoxious to them. You know it is their boast that they own the law. Should you make any attempt to call down the vengeance of the law upon them, you would soon find that you were appealing to their own friends, who would not be likely to aid you. They have already infused their corrupt influence in this section of country, and even here it would be impossible to make the public believe that the rich and splendid Leech Club are guilty of the crimes which you and I know them to be. An appeal to the law would be the surest way to defeat your ends. For then they would see to it that you and I should be put where we could no longer interfere with their little arrangements."

"I fear you are right. Our only hope is to keep secret from the Leech Club the fact that we are endeavoring to release Charity from their toils. We must try to get a larger party to aid us, and again invade this Pandemonium."

"I hope, Horace, you have by this time overcome your doubts, and that if we succeed in rescuing that excellent lady from yonder sepulchre, you will no longer hesitate to unite your fate with hers, and so afford her that protection that is her due from you. Promise me that you will, for I feel that it would be cruel to leave her again without an authorized protector."

"Oh! my friend, don't tax me so hardly. Why should I make a rash promise, which I feel I would not be likely to fulfill. Not that I think she is not worthy. So doubting a heart as mine is not worthy of her. Do you think I would be any more of a man to deceive her into a union

with one who has learned to doubt all virtue? Do not misunderstand me. I believe that if there is but one virtuous person in the world, she is that one. Nor do not think me self-righteous, for I know that I could not keep myself virtuous but by constant vigilance. These terrible trials through which we have just passed have not increased my confidence in human nature. On the contrary, they confirm my previous opinion of the utter depravity of the human heart. How then can you expect me to change so suddenly? I wish to keep myself and my doubtings all to myself. I do not want to increase my own misery and that of another whom I should vow to cherish, by placing her in a position where my doubts would be thrust upon her—where she would, perhaps, be doubted as well as aught else. There are no individuals who are intrinsically so much better than others. It is circumstances which have much to do with making them what they are. Even this diabolical Leech Club have been made so by circumstances. Power has come into their hands, and man-like, they are ready to plunder, murder, kidnap, and debauch the whole machinery of society to keep the scepter from passing from them. They doubtless at first did not intend to go to such extremes. But, in order that they shall not be overwhelmed in their iniquities, they are obliged to advance from one extreme to a greater one. So their course is always downward. So if you would keep men from becoming evil, you must, as much as possible, place checks and safeguards around them to prevent them from becoming such. Once place things unreservedly in their power, and they appropriate them as naturally as they breathe the free air of Heaven.

“I admit that I may be taking a wrong view of things ; that I ought, perhaps, to accept them ; adapt myself to them ; practice as much good as I can ; even though I am compelled to do many things that are partially evil ; and derive what good I can from contact with others. But it appears to me that men have practiced this temporizing theory so long, that there is little but bad in worldly affairs, and that he who plunges into them thoroughly, must make up his mind to throw conscience to the winds.

"Now, perhaps, I have been wrong to cherish this little thing called conscience as a miser does his gold, until I have come to value it so highly that I am not willing to sacrifice it enough to embark in the great affairs of life.

"And when my faith has been so greatly shaken in everything, why, is it singular that I should not have sufficient faith in woman and myself to unite our fates by an irrevokable vow? Better let things remain as they are than to take upon me this vow, for which I know my soul is not qualified. If I am compelled to disappoint the just hopes of an excellent woman, this must be my consolation: that it might be an infinitely greater disappointment to her to find herself united to one who, however he might love her, was lacking in all that element of faith in her, as in everything human."

"These are strange sentiments," said Mr. Graphic. "I can hardly comprehend you."

"I am not surprised at that," said Horace, "I scarcely comprehend myself."

"But do you mean to say that you would not even marry Charity to save her from the terrible fate which now hangs over her?"

"That is putting it too strong. I would risk my life to save her. Why should I not risk all else as well? Yes, yes, anything, anything would I do to save her from that living tomb!"

"Well, Horace, I cannot find it in my heart to condemn you for your singular sentiments, seeing they do not result from a morbid selfishness."

Night had now set in, and the little party retired within the grotto for rest. The next day they returned to the castle; and the Leech Club were none the wiser respecting the expedition in which they had been engaged.

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. SHOEMAN RECEIVES FURTHER INSTRUCTION IN THE WAYS
OF THE LEECH CLUB.

MR. SHOEMAN had partially recovered from the despondency into which he had been plunged by the fearful outlay of money which he had incurred to insure his election. The vivacity of the Leech Club would not long let him remain in gloomy contemplation of his losses. A "reception" must be given at Mr. Shoeman's house to the chief political workers who had dispensed the funds of the campaign. And as Mr. Shoeman's worthy son-in-law, Mr. Sindandy, had the management of the reception, it was, of course, a brilliant affair. Men from all parts of the county were present; and besides the festivities of the occasion, there was a mutual interchange of views in regard to the new state of things that was to grow out of Mr. Shoeman's election.

The promises which had been made respecting the enhancement of the interests of the county, were discussed. And here was a new source of trouble to Mr. Shoeman. His managers had promised anything that they thought would help his election, without any regard to his probable ability to fulfill these promises. The tanning and lumber interests were the chief ones to be favored, and various were the projects proposed to benefit these, most of them novel and chimerical. But what at first seemed to Mr. Shoeman to be a new snarl to entangle him into additional difficulties, was soon discovered by the ever alert Mr. Sindandy, to be a means by which his father-in-law might reimburse himself for his unprecedented outlay.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Shoeman," said a lumberman, "an idee that's jist struck me, and I think you'll say it's a good one. You know Saxafax Creek what raises in Skunk Mountain and runs down through Whip-poor-will holler into Chipmunk River. Well, there's a heap of lumber on that creek what there's no way of gettin' to market, 'cause you can't run a raft on that creek to save

yer gizzard. The rocks 'ud stave yer raft to pieces afore you'd gone the length of one of the big hemlock trees what grows up there. Now, I'll tell you what I've been thinkin' about. S'pose the rocks were cleared out of that creek, and a dam made here and there across the stream, so as to deepen the water in the narrerest and worst places. Then the timber up there could be rafted, and a good many people would be benefited. I've got a hundred acres of good hemlock up there myself. And, this, you see, would help the tannin' interest too, for the bark could be brought down on the rafts."

"Cost too much money," said Mr. Shoeman. "You never could get a grant from the State to improve a little brook like that away off in the mountains. The benefits to the State at large would be too small to warrant the outlay."

"But," said the lumberman, "you've no idee how much timber there is up there. The people of the State at large, as you call 'em, want lumber; it's gettin' scarce, and the more you git to market, the lower the price'll be. The people can afford to be taxed a little so as to git their lumber at a lower price."

"Why, man," said Mr. Shoeman, "it would cost a hundred thousand dollars to put that brook in a condition so that lumber could be rafted on it during the highest freshets that we have."

"S'posin' it does," said the lumberman, "it'll pay even at them figgers. I tell you there's a deal of lumber up there."

"How much lumber do you suppose there is within shipping distance of that creek, in case it was made capable of floating a raft in high water?"

"Why, there's twenty-five thousand dollars wuth, at least."

"But that would hardly pay for an outlay of a hundred thousand dollars on the creek."

"But you don't consider that the timber'll grow up agin and the creek can be used time after time to raft lumber on."

"How long do you think it will take that timber, after it is cut off, to grow up large enough to cut a second time?"

"Some say fifty, some eighty, and some a hundred years. But what of that? The creek once improved will be all right forever."

"It won't pay," said Mr. Shoeman, emphatically; "we can construct a road at a comparatively small expense to get that lumber out as soon as it is wanted."

Mr. Sindandy, who had been an interested listener to this conversation, scented the spoils to be reaped from the enterprise. He was astonished to find this backwoodsman so well versed in the philosophy of the Leech Club, and he said:

"I think youah friend has the right view of this mat-tah, Mistah Shoeman. This pa't of the country is pooah; the State is rich and can affoahd to do something for it. Besides it will pay the State in the long run, for all permanent improvements eventually benefit the State."

"But, as I have said," reiterated Mr. Shoeman, "a road can be built for small expense, and the interest of the money that the improvement of the creek would cost, would pay for all the horse-flesh that would ever be required to haul all the lumber ever produced in that region."

"But you forget," said the calculating, philosophical, philanthropic Mr. Sindandy, "that a road could scarcely be called a permanent, public improvement. It would soon get out of repair, and useless. But if the creek is improved, the improvement will last through all time, and be of use to those who come aftah us. We must, in ouah public acts, have rega'd for posterity. You should take pride, Mistah Shoeman, in leaving a public improvement that will transmit youah name to the latest generations."

"But I think we can make improvements that will be of more benefit than this," persisted Mr. Shoeman.

"You are mistaken there," said Mr. Sindandy. "You can benefit yourself as well as othahs in this mattah. You know, Mistah Shoeman, that you have been undah some expense to secure youah election, as every man who is elected to office has to be. Now, I will guarantee that, if we get an appropriation from the Legislacha to improve that creek, that you shall have the contract for doing the wo'k. If the appropriation is a hundred thou-

sand dollahs, you can easily make a clea profit of seventy-five thousand dollahs on it. I have known membahs of ouah Club to make la'ger profits than that on contracts, and make them honestly, too. This, with othah contracts that we expect to give you, will moah than make you whole, as we promised you from the first. Then, money that is spent in youah county will benefit youah laboring men."

These were arguments that Mr. Shoeman could not gainsay, for he saw that if he was to get back the money he had spent, he must follow the instructions of the Leech Club. And when the Legislature assembled, there was no trouble in getting an appropriation to improve "Saxafax Creek," and Mr. Shoeman had the contract, as had been agreed upon. And, though this was the largest job awarded to him, there were a number of smaller ones gotten up in his county, all of which were given to him. The total amount of these jobs was nearly three hundred thousand dollars, and it was expected that Mr. Shoeman would be able to clear profits enough on them all, to "make himself whole."

And it was not expected that the public would reap any real advantage from this immense expenditure of money taken from the pockets of the people. They were not gotten up with any idea of benefiting the public. They were simply jobs concocted to remunerate Mr. Shoeman for the money he had expended for election purposes. While there was a larger proportion of money thus squandered on swindling jobs in Mr. Shoeman's county than in any other rural county, for the reason that so large an amount of money had to be expended to carry it, and Mr. Shoeman must be reimbursed, there was a similar system of robbery organized throughout the entire State, wherever it was practicable.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE IMMUNITIES OF THE LEECH CLUB.

WHEN the chilly blast of winter began to sweep through the Catskills, the Leech Club closed their castle in the mountains, leaving it in charge of a few servants, and removed to their elegant residences in the cities. A considerable number of them graced the State capital with their gorgeous presence. Among the latter number was Mr. Shoeman, who had been elected to the Legislature. His daughter, also, and her husband, Mr. Sindandy, who was also a member of the Legislative body, were found among the gay throng at the capital. By the way, any member of the Leech Club who wished to be a member of the Legislature, or a Director in a large Railroad corporation, had but little difficulty in consummating his desires. These positions, if they did not belong to him by birthright, at least did by election, and as natural concomitants of his membership of the great and powerful Club.

Mary Shoeman now reaped a full fruition of her splendid choice of a husband. No lady at the capital shone more brilliantly than she with diamonds and costly apparel. For was she not the daughter of the rich tanner, and best of all, the wife of the elegant Mr. Sindandy? Their levees rivaled those of a royal court, were attended by the *elite*, and flattery was fairly rained upon her and her magnificent husband.

How sorry Mary felt for her old neighbor, Phebe Greenwood. Only to think that Phebe might have been there enjoying the elegancies of the Capital, as the wife of Mr. Flitaway. Instead, however, of accepting this splendid destiny, she had allowed her name to become, in a measure, identified with that of John Woodman, the fugitive from the sentence of the law. But, after all, Mary concluded it was good enough for Phebe, who had spoken so disrespectfully of her excellent husband and his friends.

The winter, with its gay rounds, wore slowly away, spring came, the Legislature adjourned, and Mr. Shoeman was again back among his native hills. His business and his fortune had suffered terribly through his great political adventure; but acts had been passed ordering certain *improvements*, especially for his indemnification, and he held in his hands contracts which were likely to more than reimburse him for his large outlay. But the particulars of this matter have been anticipated in a foregoing chapter.

As spring opened, there was a general casting about among the Leech Club and their allies, to square up their expenditures, and "get-even" with the public for the valuable services which they had rendered it. There was no stinting meanness exercised in paying off themselves and their friends. They exercised the utmost liberality; and well they could afford to, seeing that the public, that is the tax-payers, would have to foot the bills. An unbounded liberality (with other people's money) was the secret of the Leech Club's success. It was this that gave them such power in the courts, in the Legislature, and in everything that pertains to the control of public and private affairs. There is nothing like having friends, and there is no way to make friends so effectually as by being liberal.

The giving of such tremendous "contracts" to Mr. Shoeman was only one case of hundreds. The large cities were the chief seat of the contract system of reimbursing politicians for large election expenditures, and for enriching them besides. It was much easier to conceal the nature of these contracts in the cities than in the country. There were streets to clean, public buildings to erect, sewers to construct, streets to open, and hundreds of little jobs where men could make large profits without attracting too-close a scrutiny. It mattered not that, with the expenditure of fabulous sums for cleaning the streets, they remained more filthy than the Augean stables. The people managed to get along, and they would only have gotten along even if the money had been spent for its legitimate purpose. And if so many million dollars voted for the construction of a public building were used partly for that purpose, while the re-

mainder went to fill the pockets of the Leech Club and their friends, the public had a building after all, which they managed to get along with. And if the entire sum voted for the construction of a sewer were gobbled up, then all the public had to do was to manage some way to get along without a sewer, and they did contrive to do it.

And thus, while rather larger appropriations were voted for these public matters than were really necessary for first-class works, the chief difference was that, under the Leech Club administration, the tax-payers paid their money for these things without getting them, while under an honest set of officials they would still have spent approximately the same amount of money, with only the slight difference in the result, of getting what they paid for.

And so it is plain that the money, or a portion of it, would have been expended any way, with an honest administration, as well as under the Leech Club. And the people managed to get along by dispensing with those things which they paid for, or by taking up with a cheaper article than they paid for, and the balance of the funds went to the Leech Club, who found a great deal of pleasure in spending it. There was not such an immeasurable difference, after all, between the expenditures of an honest government and the same under the Leech Club rule. Under the latter the public simply had to foster republican simplicity, and get along without those public conveniences for which they were taxed; while under honest officials they could no more than have had these public improvements, and would have had to pay their money for them as well as under the Leech Club. It is true that the want of these things may have made a little difference with the general health, and the material progress of cities; but these are small matters compared to the enjoyment which the Leech Club derived from spending this money as suited their own humor.

If these arguments are somewhat mixed, it is on account of the innate difficulty of the subject, viz: that of proving that it matters little to the people how their money is spent; it matters little whether the public improvements, which they pay for, are made or not; since

if they are not, they can get along without them; while even if they have them, they can only get along, and they will have to be taxed in either case; and the public money which is not legitimately expended in the public service will contribute to the pleasures of such excellent organizations as the Leech Club.

The public treasury was not the only resource of the Leech Club for funds to reward themselves and their friends. The large railroad corporations, around the management of which they had entwined the tenacious tendrils of their far-reaching, softly-creeping vine, were an unfailing mine for them to work.

It is refreshing to trace the history of these corporations from their weak incipency, when they would hardly afford pap for a few unfledged sucking-doves, to the highly wrought and mature condition, in which these fat, downy birds, the railroad corporations, furnish gorgeous plumage, and lay golden eggs for those who are lucky enough to have the plucking of them.

In the first place, a few struggling settlers see the necessity of a thoroughfare to convey their produce to market. They form themselves into a company, and contribute of their own slender means to an extent often beyond the value of their entire possessions. But their lands and their produce are almost valueless without a railroad, and the settlers must of necessity strain every exertion to provide themselves with one. Having taxed their own means to the uttermost, they apply to the State for aid, rightly on the ground that it is a public improvement in which the whole commonwealth is either directly or indirectly interested. The company obtain from the State aid and franchises; not, however, without conditions either expressed or implied. Among these conditions is an undoubted understanding that they shall afford all reasonable accommodations to the public, at prices which shall only afford a fair remuneration for the money which the company actually invests in the enterprise. It is understood that, when the railroad shall have become prosperous, and the company rich, if they attempt to fleece the public which has granted them aid and franchises, there is a remedy at hand in a resort to legislation; that the Legislature has only to go

back to an investigation of the amount invested by the railroad company, and restrict its charges to figures that will simply afford them a fair interest on that sum.

But the Leech Club, who had gotten control of the large railroad corporations, had infused their superior wisdom into the management of them. They found means to billet their friends on them, and to keep down the dividends to a figure that need not alarm the public, nor create a desire among outsiders to invest in the stock.

If a railroad began to pay so large a dividend on its cost as to suggest the idea that the price for passengers and freight might justly be lowered, nothing was easier than to issue a large quantity of new stock, representing ten times the actual cost of the thoroughfare, and then the dividends would be quite low. And this new stock they used to reward their political friends, and to control the Legislature.

Here again we see the beneficence of the Leech Club's policy. What they made by an over-issue of stock would be so much saved to the general tax-payers. For if they had not made these sums, to help pay off political scores, and reward political friends, they would have had to invent some new species of fictitious contracts, as we have seen in Mr. Shoeman's case, in order to "get even" for large election and other expenditures. So it will be seen that the Leech Club, though excessively extravagant, were fruitful in resources to raise money; and that they always forbore to take the money directly from the tax-payers when they could find means to obtain it from these same tax-payers under some other name than taxes.

While it is true that the public actually did pay this money in high rates for freight and passage on the railroads, it will be seen that they were not compelled to pay it, for they could stay at home if they chose, and then the railroad could not charge them a high price for a ticket; and they need not have their goods sent on the cars, and then a high price could not be charged them for freight. The railroad company were fully as just as the sea-captain who, after he had gotten his passengers well out on the ocean, doubled the price of board;

and when they grumbled, he very properly informed them that they need not board with him if they did not like his fare and his prices. They left the people a free choice; and if that choice simply involved an acceptance of the railroad company's terms on one hand, or isolation, decay and starvation on the other, it was not the railroad's fault. The public had the easy-to-be-decided choice, "take that or none," and they were saved the vexation of soul as to which they would choose.

But it is not the object of this work to discuss railroad economy or politics any further than to show up the advantages of belonging to the Leech Club. The members of that beneficent organization had the best pickings of everything. We have heretofore shown how they flourish in the public service. In railroad corporations their status is equally advantageous.

It is held by some that a thief would be the happiest man in the world if the penalties of the law were not hanging over him: for he is not like other men compelled to labor for the things he desires. He has only to go and help himself from the fruits of other men's labors. The world is his oyster, and he only has to open it. But there is the drawback, that the oyster sometimes shuts up on his fingers, and holds him as in a vise; just as thieving rats in an oyster cellar sometimes get their tails caught between the closing shells of the bivalves. Then, again, it often happens that, when he gets his oyster opened, some officious cook peppers and salts it so highly with drips from the law, that he finds it fit for anything else but eating.

But members of the Leech Club were not vexed with any such drawbacks as these. They could enjoy the luxury of stealing with as great impunity as other men could the fruits of an honest day's work. They could steal anything from a paltry little appropriation of a few thousand dollars for repairing a public building, up to three-fourths of the income of the State Treasury, or a whole railroad. And these things they could do, and many men did not even call it stealing, so neatly was it done. But it was indifferent to them what the transaction was called, so that they got the articles, and no one could bring them to account. They had an advan-

tage in this, that they were above public opinion; for their connections were so extensive that they had framed a public opinion of their own.

It was as if they had free access to every man's pocket, from which they could take what they chose. Surely every man had reason to regard them as very benevolent gentlemen, if they left him anything at all. The public treasury was to them as the unguarded vault of a bank would be to chivalrous gentlemen of the highway. If this failed, they had only to set their printing presses at work to making public bonds, or railroad stocks. They could easily realize the money on the former on the public credit; and they would take care that the people paid enough for freight and passage on the thoroughfares, to make the latter productive of dividends. Was not the happiness of the Leech Club unspeakable?

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RUMBLING THUNDERS OF RETRIBUTION ARE HEARD AMONG THE CATSKILLS.

THE beauty of a republican government is that, however unscrupulous men may, by rings and combinations, get control of public affairs for a time, the people are sure to awake sooner or later, and topple these bogus kings from their thrones. Public oppressors and plunderers have never the moderation to restrict their nefarious acts within the bounds of sufferance. Impunity increases their audacity, and they soon push their oppressive measures so far that the people rise in a mass, and sweep the parasites of society off the body politic as with the besom of destruction. It is truly said to the great disparagement of the Evil One, that he helps and tempts men into difficulties, without ever thinking of helping them out. So the greatest abuses under a free government finally cure themselves, and are not perpetuated, as is too often the case under a monarchy.

It is only a pity that some method of government has not been invented by which we may be saved from this constant vibration between virtue and monstrosity. Under our present system of government, virtuous rule predominates for a while; then the government falls into the hands of men who foist themselves upon it for the sole purpose of plunder; just as thieves sometimes foist themselves upon respectable society, in order that they may have the opportunity to pick pockets and steal plate. They carry on the government for a time, and soon the dignity of their position actually makes stealing respectable. Finally the people awake, and hurl the rogues from power, and then we again have a season of measurably honest rule. Thus the government is constantly being knocked about like a foot-ball between a respectable administration and a roguish one.

What an immense waste of material would be saved if some method of government could be adopted by which these constant fluctuations might be thwarted; what volumes of scandal would be saved to our literature, could some great lawgiver spring up and invent a system that would preclude the possibility of a government ever falling wholly into the hands of thieves. The person who would conjure up such an invention, would confer the greatest secular benefit ever yet known to mankind, and immortalize himself beyond the fame of the greatest philosophers either of ancient or modern times.

When Mr. Shoeman returned from his service in the Legislature, he immediately entered upon the "contracts" which had been awarded to him, in order to make good his impaired fortunes. Men were soon set at work blasting rocks in order to render "Saxafax Creek" navigable for rafts of lumber. "Skunk Mountain" was becoming as foully odorous in the nostrils of discerning, honest men, as the fragrant animal from which it derived its name. All of Mr. Shoeman's "contracts" were soon under way, and he was expending a few thousand dollars, for which he was to get about three hundred thousand dollars from the State. He had not as yet received anything to reimburse him for his vast outlay in the previous year's election; but he had the most undoubted assurance that these "contracts" would make him all right.

People looked on in astonishment at this waste of public money; and Mr. Shoeman, who had not yet become thoroughly imbued with the nonchalant philosophy of Mr. Sindandy, almost shrank away out of sight as the work proceeded. He was sometimes almost of a mind to throw the whole thing up, submit to the losses he had suffered, and forswear politics hereafter, especially the politics of the Leech Club.

He as much as signified his thought of doing so to the leaders of the Club at their headquarters in the city. This hastened the removal of certain members of the Club to their castle in the Catskills, in order that Mr. Shoeman might be supported in his faltering steps, and saved from backsliding. The charming Mr. Sindandy and his wife were among the number who resolved to make the castle their home during that summer. Soon the usual rounds of gaiety were again in vogue at the castle. It is hardly necessary to say that the easy philosophy and *naivete* of Mr. Sindandy triumphed over the scruples of Mr. Shoeman; and the work on the "contracts" proceeded. Mr. Sindandy understood the power of example, and he pointed out to Mr. Shoeman the numerous "contracts" in the large cities that were being prosecuted under the auspices of the Leech Club, in which very large profits would be made. And no one would be hurt, because the State would pay the bills.

And now the consummate plans of the Leech Club were going on swimmingly in every part of the State. The people were being bled freely, and they did not seem to mind it either. In fact, there never was a people who seemed so indifferent to the loss of blood. When the Leech Club tapped a vein in their arm, they did not more than flinch as ordinary people would at the bite of a musquito. When a vein in the other arm was opened, they only gave the member a flirt, as if a common house-fly had lit there. Then when a vein in each leg was opened, they might have thought that a couple of good sized musquitoes, who had been grinding their bills for the summer campaign, had just been trying them to see if they were in proper condition; but the patient people immediately settled down again, like an old gentleman disturbed in his after-dinner nap by a foraging fly.

And now the Leech Club had bled the people in so many places, that there was scarcely another spot for these bloodsuckers to get hold of but the jugular vein. Should they tap this, the people would probably be so weak that they could not shake off their insidious tormentors, even if they would. Would the people awake before they were bled into a state of syncope? before the jugular vein was opened by the leeches?

The press began to warn the people that they were approaching a moribund condition, and that if they suffered these leeches to suck their blood much longer, they would not be able to arise at all from their stupor. And when the Leech Club were resting secure under the impression that the people were so completely bled that they had not strength left to make a concentrated effort, they began to awake as a giant from a nightmare. They arose upon their feet, and looked around in a half-asleep, stupefied manner, as if wondering what it was that had been crushing them down in their slumbers like an incubus.

The Leech Club looked upon this demonstration of their victim with astonishment. "Why," said they, "my good sir, what is the matter? Pray, lie down and go to sleep again! We assure you there is nothing wrong, and you certainly have not had your nap half out yet. Now go to sleep again, there's a good fellow, and we'll see that no harm comes to you."

But the people began to observe the wounds in its arms, its legs, and every part of the body, where the leeches had been bleeding it, and it was in no mood to go to sleep again until it had stanchèd the flow of blood, and secured the bloodsuckers, so that they could not immediately open the wounds afresh.

Meetings were held in the large cities, the wholesale swindling that had been going on for years was even characterized as robbery, and both press and public speakers did not hesitate to name the gorgeous, the accomplished, the powerful Leech Club as thieves. It was astonishing to see how the elaborate fabric which the Club had erected as the stage of their drama, dissolved from under them like phantoms of the Catskills. They had at one time boasted, and it was no idle braggadocio, that they owned the Legislature, the law, and the courts. But

all these things failed them now. Corrupt judges were deposed, or resigned in a panic; and soon it was the case that their minions dared not take the seats to which they had been fraudulently elected in the Legislature.

They had placed their trust in the power of stolen money, and it failed them at last. People shrank from their lucre as if it had been proffered by the hand of a contaminating leper. For once it was demonstrated that even money may come from so base a source that the majority of people will have none of it. Ah! Horace Lackfathe, it looks as if you will have to abate somewhat of your severe judgment of mankind!

Members of the Leech Club were arrested and held under heavy bail to answer for the public moneys which they had embezzled. The powers which they held as public officials were wrested from them; they were either deposed, compelled to resign, or suspended. The property of many of them was sequestered, and held to secure the public treasury for the funds they had embezzled from it. They had to exercise their ingenuity in the new roll of trying to keep out of prison. Some of them were actually incarcerated, being unable to procure the heavy bail required. Those who had been assigned fraudulent contracts were obliged to abandon them forthwith. In short, the Leech Club were completely demoralized.

As Mr. Shoeman had as yet drawn no money from the public treasury on his contracts, there could be no action against him. All the money he had thus far spent on these so-called public improvements, was out of his own pocket. He had expected soon to be paid the full amount of his contract price; but now he must give up the jobs, and the money that he had expended on them was gone with the rest which he had squandered on his election. Moreover, he was obliged to become responsible in heavy bail to keep his son-in-law, Mr. Sindandy, out of prison. There were also others of his Leech Club friends for whom he was persuaded to become bail, and his entire property was pledged in this way.

It is not our object to enter into the details of the public prosecution of the Leech Club. It is a matter of current history, with which the people are generally ac-

quainted. We shall only give so much of it as has a bearing on the characters of this story. With the foregoing general statements, we will proceed to the conclusion.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DRIVEN TO THE WALL.

DURING the first public prosecutions of the members of the Leech Club, the most of them were able to obtain bail, and so avoided imprisonment. They furnished the bail among themselves, as far as the public authorities would accept the same. But as the fountain of their wealth was dried up—in other words, as the public funds were wrested from their control, their means were soon exhausted. They could no longer satisfy the prosecuting officers that the bail they furnished for each other was sufficient, and they were obliged to dodge about like fugitive rats, to keep out of limbo.

Even those who had given bail on the first charges were not securè. New charges were constantly coming up against those who had already been bailed on former complaints. New orders were issued for the arrest of Mr. Sindandy, Mr. Swellup, Mr. Flitaway, and others of that ilk, who were residing at the Club House in the Catskills. Mr. Shoeman had become responsible for these parties on previous bail bonds to the full extent to which the authorities would take his signature. Consequently the only resource which his worthy friends now had to escape imprisonment was to avoid the service of the papers. They had the best facilities in the world for doing so in the recesses and caverns of the mountains. It was believed that it was only a spasm of virtue that had come over the people, which induced the prosecution of the Leech Club, and that the excitement and danger would soon blow over, when the Club could resume their impaired authority.

The warrants placed in the hands of city officers for the arrest of those who had resorted to the Catskills, might as well have been issued against foxes, rabbits or other small animals which burrow in the mountains. The officers called at the castle, but of course the gentlemen whom they sought were not in. The approach of the officers had been duly announced by vigilant watchers, and the vermin had fled away into their holes. In this manner the orders of the courts were set at defiance. The members of the Club would fly to cover when danger approached, and return to the castle to renew their junketing and rounds of pleasure as soon as the officers had retired. Thus the proscribed members were able to avoid arrest, and still be near enough to the city to look after their interests; and perhaps make a telling stroke for the resumption of power as soon as this excitement should be tided over.

Their life at the castle was by no means an irksome one to them. With good cheer, amusements in which amateur theatricals were combined, hunting and fishing, they managed very well to kill time and drive away *ennui*.

And where, at this time, were Horace Lackfathe and Mr. Graphic? Where were Charity Faithful and Susan Clarkson? Where were John Woodman and the Hermit of the Catskills?

After the unfortunate failure to rescue Charity from the cavern, Horace and Mr. Graphic, with three stout mountaineers, made another expedition into the cave, continuing the search three days. But with the exception of the echoes of their own footsteps, all was silent as the grave. Not even the ghostly apparitions deigned to afford them objects for an encounter. They searched every nook and ramification to which they could obtain access. They by means of ropes, penetrated to the deep gulf into which Horace had fallen during his first visit, but they discovered no traces of her whom they sought. There were many deep openings into which they were unable to descend, but such they could never believe to be the abiding places of human beings. They were at length compelled to give up the search in despair. The Leech Club were about to leave their castle for the season, and

Horace and Mr. Graphic had no alternative but to depart for the city. Horace had cherished a vain hope that he might enlist the authorities in an investigation of the matter, but he could obtain no credence from officials in regard to the story. Or, if those to whom he related it had any idea that it might be true, they had their own reasons for not engaging in a crusade against the Leech Club.

Horace now found surcease of his brooding over the degeneracy of the times in the pre-occupation of his mind in contemplating the probably terrible fate of Charity Faithful. How he upbraided himself for not following the advice of Mr. Graphic to make Charity his wife, and thus obtaining the right to protect her, hurry her away from the fatal precincts. Not that he craved unity in marriage with her, or any woman. Greatly as he loved her, he could only bring his doubting heart up to the decision of marriage through the idea of saving her from the terrible fate to which she had been consigned in the gloomy cavern.

Horace had been casting about in despair and agony, for some means to relieve Charity, if still alive, from her dark captivity, but without success, when winter set in. It was now useless to attempt to penetrate the Catskills, buried beneath many feet of snow, and he was obliged to desist from further effort. How Horace passed that winter in the city, vacillating between doubt, hope and despair, will never be known till the seas and the mountains give up their dead, and the sighs that have been vibrating through the empty space of the universe for ages, shall be echoed back as the returning waves of sorrow called in by the sound of Gabriel's trump, shall concentrate around the throne of judgment at the last day. The grief, the agony, the wrestling of soul, the despair which Horace endured, was ten times greater than any which could possibly have been endured by Charity in the cavern, though she had suffered death by the slow process of starvation.

When warm weather came again, the breezes which wafted the perfume of the flora of the Catskills also brought tidings of the Leech Club's discomfiture. The story soon became common in the city that it was impos-

sible to ferret out the members of the Club who were in the Catskills, in order to serve papers on, and arrest them. Horace at once divined that they most probably took refuge in the mysterious cave. He sought out the proper authorities, and told the story of the wonderful cavern, offering to conduct a force of the police to its obscure entrance. He hoped in this manner to learn some tidings of Charity. At first his story was looked upon as a probable hoax, and he could make no impression on the officials. Finally he got the ear of a noted detective, and prevailed on him to get up an expedition to the Catskills, to test the truth of his statements. Horace said nothing about the supernatural appearances, knowing that the mention of these would throw discredit on the whole story.

The force consisted of twenty armed officers, besides Horace and his friend, Mr. Graphic. They were well provided with ropes and other articles for their explorations. They proceeded to the Catskills in such a manner as to avoid attracting attention. Three of the officers first approached the castle, and inquired for certain members of the Leech Club. Of course these gentlemen were not there—had not been there for a long time.

The three officers then returned to the main body, and the whole, under the guidance of Horace and Mr. Graphic, set out for the cavern. Reaching the secluded valley heretofore mentioned, they encamped for the night. Many were the mutterings and expressions of doubt among the officers both on the way to, and upon reaching the valley. And when they were shown the diminutive hole into which they must crawl, they declared they would not enter such a fox's burrow as that. They laughed in derision, and asked Horace if he took them for a lot of ferrets that were going to worm their way through crevices in the rocks to hunt out rats. Turning about, they returned to their encamping place in disgust.

Horace was again in despair. He begged, entreated, and offered a liberal reward to just one of the officers who would accompany him into the narrow entrance and verify the truth of the statement that there was an extensive cavern within. He finally prevailed on one of

the number to accompany him, and the two entered the opening, Horace leading the way. After a couple of hours they returned, and so wonderful was the description given by the officer to his comrades that nothing could now restrain them from entering the strange cavern.

They carried an ample supply of provisions, and were determined on a thorough exploration. Each man carried a torch, and many were the expressions of astonishment as the wonders of the subterranean vastness were unfolded before the lurid glare of the torches. Horace, who had a short time before been regarded either as an impostor or a madman, was now a lion in their estimation.

All went well until a narrow defile just ahead of them appeared to be guarded by a force of men at least equal to their own. The officers now felt sure that they had come in contact with the persons for whom they were searching. With cocked pistols they demanded the surrender of the supposed fugitives from the law. They were answered by a medley of hideous shouts and noises, the walls of the cavern seemed to shake, and there was a rumbling, clattering sound, as if rocks were tumbling down, and the roof of the cavern falling in. Even Horace and Mr. Graphic, who were familiar with the terrors of the place, had never witnessed anything half so horrible before. The whole company stood aghast with terror. The officers had heard nothing of these unaccountable manifestations, and they were totally unprepared for such an infernal demonstration. But Horace and Mr. Graphic were only less terrified than the others. The officers embraced and clung to each other, some uttering ejaculatory prayers, some giving vent to imprecations, and all acting as if they considered their last moment at hand.

As the tumult ceased, and the officers had, in a measure, regained their nerve, they discharged their pistols at the semblances of men, who still appeared to guard the defile. The echoing reports of the pistols were intermingled with another bedlam of hideous noises and rumbling of falling rocks, and apparent shaking of the walls around them. This time many thought they saw

large fragments of rock fall from the roof just ahead of them. Horace had by this time braced his courage up to the emergency and he shouted out :

“Onward, men! They are nothing that can hurt you! See how I will beard these goblins on their own ground!”

Horace and Mr. Graphic rushed forward, and as they came opposite the apparitions, the latter dissolved before the torches, but resumed their places as the torches got beyond them. Horace and his friend, after running this hideous gauntlet, halted. There were the apparitions the same as before, while the officers stood as if hesitating whether to follow or retreat. Horace shouted to them to come on, but as this was answered by another hideous demonstration similar to the other two, the officers turned and fled in a panic. They retreated till they got out of sight of the apparitions, and then halted, not being certain which way to proceed.

“I really believe,” said one of the demoralized officers, “that that Horace Lackfathe is the devil himself, and that he has got us in here for some of his infernal purposes! I have all the time thought there was something wrong about him.”

“He and his friend must be in league with them goblins,” said another, “or they’d never run up among them as they did.”

“Men,” said the leader of the officers, “I am ashamed of you, to think that you backed out from following a couple of civilians into danger. Didn’t you hear the two civilians shout, ‘it is nothing that can hurt you?’ I’ll warrant that this is nothing but some trick got up by the Leech Club to frighten us away, and those two men that went ahead understood it so. Now, men, you must follow me through that passage, goblins, or no goblins! Not even if the roof of the cavern falls in on us must we retreat. The first man that flinches, I will have him cashiered for cowardice. Right about face, now! Forward!”

There was no chance for expostulation. This brief, determined speech of the leader, and the discipline to which the men were accustomed, did the work. They would probably have followed their chief through the

fires of Pandemonium itself, rather than run the risk of being reported for cowardice. As they advanced, they met Horace and his friend coming to seek them. The chief cried out to them to lead the way, and that he and his men would follow. Without another word the whole company now proceeded through the narrow defile. But the apparitions, as if awed by the determined advance, had vanished, and the company passed through without encountering another exhibition of terrors.

A dreary round of searching through chambers, narrow passages, crannies, and chasms, now took place. Precautions were taken to guard against becoming lost in the cavern. The deep gulf, heretofore mentioned, was entered by means of ropes, and explored, as far as its unfathomable chasms would permit. No perceivable chamber or recess, which was accessible, was left unvisited; but even then the explorers were compelled to admit to themselves that there might be a hundred secret chambers, the entrances to which could be easily concealed. The difficulties of the task were so apparent that the officers declared that the Leech Club had, in this cave, a hiding place from which they could never be unearthed, till the fires of the last day of the world should smoke them from their burrows.

As they threaded their uncertain way in the bottom of the gulf, near the base of its boundary wall of rock, Horace Lackfathe caught sight of a momentary gleam of light above them in the upper part of the cavern. It appeared like a beam from a dark lantern, which was instantly obscured. He kept his eye on the point from which the light appeared. Soon he saw it again, and this time it lit up the weird features of a man, which Horace recognized. He was certain that he could not be mistaken. It was the Hermit of the Catskills! The outlines of his strange countenance were struck out in the darkness like a spirit photograph thrown upon the background of murky night. The flash of light which revealed this face, was but momentary, and the beam of light was instantly concealed. Had not Horace been certain that he knew the face, he would have thought it was one of those unaccounta-

ble, supernatural appearances, which he had so many times encountered.

Without saying a word that would have brought the band to a halt, and thus given an intimation to the strange individual, who was apparently watching them, that he was observed, Horace made his way to the chief officer, and imparted to him the information, briefly recapitulating what he knew of the Hermit of the Catskills, and expressing the opinion that he was in league with the Leech Club. A plan was soon concocted to make two flank movements upon the Hermit. But, in order not to excite suspicion, the present line of march was continued for a while longer. In the meantime the leader called his lieutenant to his side and imparted to him his plan. The force was divided, and part of it began a counter-march. The plan was to head the Hermit off on either hand. The two parties proceeded in opposite directions as far as was thought to be necessary, and then each prepared to ascend the wall out of the gulf. In order that they might readily do so, each was provided with ropes, and each had a staff which could be spliced in sections till it reached a length of fifty feet. On the end of this staff was a hook to hold the rope. By means of this arrangement the rope could be fastened in a loop around a crag of rock above, on the top of the ledge, which hemmed in the gulf. The rope was provided throughout its entire length with small loops, within stepping distance, up which a man could ascend with ease. In this manner the two parties, at points a considerable distance apart, ascended out of the gulf simultaneously. They then began to approach each other. Now if the Hermit is between these two parties, he is hemmed in by them, and the perpendicular wall of the gulf on one hand, and the cavern wall on the other. If he is in this situation, he must either leap down a precipice fifty feet, disappear in the cavern wall, or be captured.

The two parties moved slowly toward each other, over the dangerous floor of the cavern. Horace marched in front of one of the parties, with eyes alert. At length he saw another momentary gleam of light, a short distance ahead, this time apparently about half-way up the

cavern wall. At once the thought darted upon Horace's mind that it was the Hermit escaping in the strange and unaccountable manner that he had known him to do on other occasions. Horace hastily asked the nearest officer to follow, and rushed forward to the spot. As the two reached the place they held their torches aloft, and actually saw the semblance of a man disappear, as if in the rock, close to the roof of the cavern. They waited till the two parties came up, and then told what they had seen. No one doubted their story, for this was nothing compared to the wonders that had previously been exhibited.

"Well," said the chief officer, "I see no use in continuing this search longer. There is nothing solid and tangible here but the rocks; and even they present no barrier to the inhabitants of this infernal cave. We are all the victims of some tremendous delusion, or this cave is the abode of goblins and devils."

"True for you," said one of the subordinates; "I've thought for some time that we have only been chasin' the shadders of the devil and his imps."

"Yes," said another, "and I've been expectin' all the time to see these rocks open and swallow us up into hell-fire. But as long as the capt'n said foller, I ain't the man to back down. If he chooses to lead the way into fire and brimstone with all the imps of pergeratory howlin' around like they did back yender, here's what goes with him."

"That's me, too," said another, "but it goes awfully agin the grain to fight with bein's that can't feel a hard knock, and chase shadders that dissolve into worse than nothin' when you git within strikin' distance of them."

"I," said another, "'drether go for six men of real flesh and bones than one of them cussed spirits, that only seem to be enticin' you on to some deep hole, where per'aps you'll fall into a brimstone lake; for, I tell you, boys, I've actily smelt brimstone to-day, I have!"

"Faith!" said an Irish officer, "and I smiled that same mesel'. And I was a wonderin', should I die here, whether the praste could iver say masses enough to git me sowl out of this divilish pit. For it is nayther pur-

getory nor hell. It's worse nor 'em both, sure. There's nothin' in the prayer book about this place."

"Never fear, Larry," said the chief officer, "if you die here, the devil won't be able to find you, and the money for the masses will all be saved for your family."

"And niver find me, is it you say the divil niver would! Indade, an' I think he's found us all purty well. I'll warrant he'll give yer honor a good snug berth for bringin' him such a fine rayenforcement. Ye'll most likely, afore long, be a ladin' just such a band of ragamuffin goblins as them we met soon afther comin' into this sink hole o' hell, bad cess to it."

Notwithstanding the gloom of the situation, a laugh followed this speech. And as this slight burst of merriment was echoed in hollow tones among the rocks, it sounded like the sardonic mirth of the infernal regions, if we may be allowed to conjecture the nature of the same. As it subsided, the chief said:

"I don't crave the honor of such a command, Larry."

"True, indade, there's prishes little honor about ony of it. But the divil niver asks men if they likes the honorable posations in his kingdom. Wonst let them git to be his subjects, and if he haypens to want a clerk, he just says, 'Mister So-and-So, you can take ye'r seat at that red-hot table there, and kape the day book. Then he whales him up a red-hot chair, and gives him a pen hotter nor a rod of iron from a blacksmith's forge, and melted iron for ink. Sure an' the divil's honors are give in the same spirit as them of that great instetooshon, the State's preson. It's worse nor what you call Hobbs' son's choice, 'Take this or none.' You must take it anyhow, whether nor you want it or not, sure!"

"Well, Larry, I judge from your description, it's no sinecure office to be the devil's bookkeeper, whatever the other honorable positions within his gift may be."

"As for that, the posations are all alike. Ye may be jist about as thaynkful to Baelzebub for his honors as ye would have rayson to be, sure, to any rich man as would pour melted gold all over ye, and say, 'There, now, troth, and haint I made ye rich!'"

"Why, Larry, you know so much about the devil and his ways, you must have made him a visit some time."

“Faith, an’ it’s yersel’ that introduced me to his establishment; for hain’t we all made him a visit this very day, sure?”

Another doleful laugh followed this repartee, in which the chief officer joined.

While this doleful badinage was going on, Horace Lackfathe was examining the cavern wall, into which the strange individual had been seen to disappear. He soon discovered that the rocky wall was here jagged, and that a foothold could be obtained sufficient to ascend it. Accompanied by Mr. Graphic, he climbed up to the roof. After a careful examination, he discovered an aperture large enough for a person to crawl through. He entered this without a light far enough to satisfy himself that there was an open chamber on the other side. He now felt convinced that he had found the chamber into which the Hermit of the Catskills had escaped. Returning, he communicated his discovery to the officers.

Immediately the whole company commenced clambering up the side by the natural and irregular steps which Horace had discovered. Horace was the first to enter the narrow aperture, followed by Mr. Graphic. As Horace emerged into the inner chamber, he was obliged to display his torch. Though he was seeking to find human beings, his surprise was immeasurable on discovering through the gloom a group of persons in the farther portion of the chamber. The light which revealed them was so dim that it was impossible to distinguish anything more than that they were persons, or at least the semblances of such. No sooner had the torch been displayed through the aperture, than there was evidently a great commotion among the inmates of the chamber, and Horace thought that he heard the shrieks of women. He was not long, however, left in doubt as to the identity of one of the inmates, at least, for he heard a voice, unmistakably that of the Hermit of the Catskills:

“On your life, I charge you, retire, or you are a dead man! We are armed, and I will convince you that you are entirely at our mercy! The messenger which I shall send you, would take your life, if I so willed!

An arrow struck and shivered upon the rock close to Horace. There was no alternative but for him to with-

draw into the aperture. He communicated with the chief officer, and the two began to confer together, as if to devise some means to avoid the loss of life. The case was one of extraordinary difficulty. The aperture would admit but one person through at once, and Horace could see no steps in the rock by which to descend into the chamber; and as far as he knew, there was no method but the slow process of letting themselves down into the chamber by ropes. While they were doing this, their enemies could pick them off one by one with the utmost ease. But no way could be thought of but the almost certainly-fatal one of facing the arrows and bullets of the inmates of the chamber. Horace next sought to engage the Hermit in a parley. Approaching without a light to the entrance of the chamber, he said in a loud, distinct voice:

"Tell us, you who are called the Hermit of the Catskills, are you a friend or an enemy to the Leech Club?"

It was plain from the ambiguous answer of the Hermit that he did not know whether he was addressed by a friend or an enemy of the Club, and that he did not care to commit himself.

"I have not," said the Hermit, "taken up my abode in these mountains to act as the friend or enemy of any one. I have only to be let alone by those who do not wish to have me for an enemy. I bestow my friendship only where I think it is needed."

"What," said Horace, "do you know about a young woman by the name of Charity Faithful? Why do you hold her a prisoner, and what have you done with her?"

"Who told you that I held her a prisoner?"

"I saw her in your custody myself."

"Does it follow because she was under my protection that she was my prisoner?"

"What other inducement could there have been for her to remain with you in this dreary den?"

"That is a question that I cannot now answer, but if ever she has the opportunity to speak to mortal ears, the world will learn that I am not her enemy."

"Is she, then, dead?"

“That is not for you to know. You are not of us, and I charge you as you value your life to retire.”

This conversation was carried on in utter darkness. The party of officers in the rear heard it with something of the awe with which they might listen to a voice from the clouds. They were not certain whether it was the voice of an earthly or supernatural being which came from the dark chamber, but their experiences in the cavern had rather inclined them to the opinion that it was other than a human being who addressed Horace.

Horace crept carefully through the aperture into the chamber, determined to take a brief survey, and see if there was any method of descent into the chamber, even at the risk of his life. As he got fairly within, he freed the light of his torch, in order to look around. Instantly the Hermit bent his bow double with an arrow on the string, and with deadly aim was about to fire. Horace's torch shone full upon his own countenance, thus rendering his fate more certain. But it was this revealing of his features which saved, instead of losing his life. A female voice was heard to cry, as she pushed the deadly arrow aside :

“Oh, God! good Hermit, do not shoot! I know him! He is my friend!”

The arrow was swerved but slightly from its course by this fortuitous movement, and it actually grazed Horace's clothing. The woman who had done this merciful act now rushed wildly across the chamber toward Horace; and it was evident that he recognized her; for having discovered the crags by which a descent could be made, he hastened down into the chamber.

And now after these long agonizing months of doubt and suffering, of faint hope and deep despair, Horace Lackfathe and Charity Faithful were clasped in each other's arms!

Who can depict the astonishment of the officers as they, hearing the tumult, scrambled through the narrow passage, deployed on the crags at the top of the rocky wall within the chamber, and witnessed this exhibition of fervid affection between Horace Lackfathe and one whom they had reason to think was a sprite of the mountains. The Hermit of the Catskills, too, for once seemed non-

plused. He stood with bow in hand hanging at his side, looking on at a distance, his placid, gloomy countenance wearing an expression of puzzled thought.

The conversation of the officers showed that they knew not how to regard this new situation—whether it was some new fantasy of the supernatural inhabitants of the cavern, or whether the two whose embrace, it seemed, would never relax, were human. It is true that there was Horace Lackfathe whom they had lately regarded as one of their number, but they had before had reason to think that he was in league with the goblins of the cave. Now they again began to indulge in such thoughts, and to arrive at the conclusion that he had found a congenial spirit in the shadowy female, into whose arms he had incontinently rushed. It was, indeed, a perplexing situation for men of better education and sounder philosophy than most of the officers. They were in a *terra incognita*, where the palpable and impalpable were so strangely blended that the party of officers had about given up all attempts to distinguish between the shadowy and the real. They therefore stood or sat upon their uncertain footing upon the crags, looking on the scene with much the feelings of men who had been treated to a view in fairy land.

The long, fervent embrace of Horace and Charity at length relaxed, but he seemed unwilling to trust her from the protection of his encircling arm. Their first words were monosyllables, choked with paroxysms of joy, too deep for utterance.

Explanations were finally made, and Horace learned that the Hermit was a most worthy friend of Charity, instead of a persecutor, as he had wrongly supposed.

“Only think, Horace,” said Charity, “that you and the Hermit, who had every reason to be friends if you had only understood each other, have been engaged in deadly combat, and narrowly escaped taking each other’s lives. It makes me shudder to think that that arrow from the Hermit’s bow would have killed you, if I had not seen your face by the light of your torch, and recognized you, and pushed the arrow aside!”

“Yes, and it grieves my own soul,” said Horace, “to think that I have come near, on several occasions, un-

wittingly doing a similar bad service for him. What terrible agony, Charity, might have been saved, had it not been for these cruel mistakes."

"I thought your voice sounded familiar, Horace, when you were talking to the Hermit, and I would have been sure it was you, only that I thought it came from an enemy, and that I knew you were not one, and concluded I must be mistaken. But I could not forbear to keep a close watch, and try to see your face by the torch light. And there seemed to be a Providence in it that caused me to do so, for it saved your life. The Hermit never misses his mark at so short a distance, when undisturbed."

"And think how, months ago, I and my friends pursued the Hermit, thinking he held you prisoner, when we could have gotten you out of this cavern then, with ease, if we had only understood each other!"

"Your voice sounded familiar to me then, Horace, and I remarked to my companion in misery, Susan Clarkson, that it sounded like you. And you passed within three feet of where we were concealed, and when you stopped and fired your pieces at your pursuers, I could have touched you with my hand. Oh! if I could only have known you then, what worlds would I have given, not alone on my own account, but also that of my poor companion! I never can forget the agony of that hour, Horace. Our protectors, the Hermit and John Woodman, had been driven away, thinking you were enemies. We heard the fighting, and gave them up for dead. Then the terrible fate of being left in that awful, gloomy place to die by inches, stared us in the face. And there you were within reach, anxious to save us, and we thought you were enemies! What misery is caused by a little mistake! And yet I think the Lord has left us to these tribulations for some good purpose, Horace."

"I, too, believe He has," said Horace, in deep meaning tones! for amid this uncertain gloom, light had suddenly flashed upon his doubting soul. He felt that, at least, one weight of doubt had been stricken from his burthen. He saw at least one rift in the clouds of doubt that had so long obscured his sky; and this change came upon him there as suddenly as the sun sometimes peeps through the hitherto impenetrable mists. And this suddenly

eliminated doubt was the one which had made him question whether it would not add to the misery of both him and Charity, should they be united in marriage. But he now felt that this doubt would never more perplex him, and that he would, on the contrary, find at least one source of trust and happiness through union with her. Was this the good which Providence was to bring out of these fearful tribulations? Horace believed it was, but as Charity had never known the state of his mind, she could not draw such a specific inference. She believed that good was to grow out of their troubles, and let us hope it will rain upon her, for she is deserving.

It was some time before Charity could convince the Hermit that Horace was in reality her and his friend. But when he found that Horace was a most bitter enemy of the Leech Club, he hesitated no longer, and treated Horace with all the cordiality which his gloomy, impassive nature was ever known to manifest. And there were John Woodman and Susan Clarkson; and soon all comprehended the deliverance that was at hand. They gathered around Horace, and were ready to carry him in their arms.

All this time the officers on top of the cavern wall had been viewing these strange proceedings in blank wonder. The most of them were thoroughly convinced that the whole thing was but the freak and flummery of goblins. At length Horace shouted out to the officers:

"Come, men! come down here! these are friends! and they will help us hunt out the Leech Club!"

But not a man stirred. Many of them declared that they would battle no more with spectres. Only show them men of real flesh and blood, who could receive, as well as give blows, and they would face any danger to meet them. They were now well convinced that Horace had connection with the goblins. Had not Mr. Graphic been among the officers, they would have retreated. But he derided their superstitious fears, and shouted to Horace to come up there and convince them that he was a man, and not a goblin. As Horace neared them, many of them shrank aside, as if they thought his touch would blight them. He explained the whole matter in such a natural and common-place manner that they were reas-

sured, and with a little urging from their leader, they descended into the chamber.

They were soon on speaking terms with the Hermit and his party, learning that the latter were victims of the Leech Club. On consulting with the Hermit, they became convinced that he could render them valuable aid in ferreting out those they sought. The two females were left in the chamber under the protection of Mr. Graphic, while all the rest of the party, including the Hermit and John Woodman, set out on another tortuous round of exploration. The Hermit directed all the others to proceed out of the chamber by the same passage at which they entered, while he would meet them at a point in the outer cavern to which John Woodman would conduct them.

They proceeded under their new guide for a considerable distance, when John ordered a halt. Here they waited for several minutes. At length they saw a light twinkling back in a narrow, lateral passage, which they had not before noticed. Soon the Hermit walked forth from this, and joined the party. How he had gotten there from the chamber where they left him, no one knew. It was evident that he had found exit from the chamber by some secret passage other than that by which the officers entered and retired. It was also plain that the Hermit and his party were not cornered in the chamber by the officers, had the latter been enemies; for the Hermit had thus practically demonstrated that he knew of a secret line of retreat. How he got out of the chamber, even Mr. Graphic, who was left with the females, could not afterwards tell. Probably, while he was engaged with the woman, the Hermit had quietly withdrawn through a secret passage known only to himself. Either this must have been the case, or else the Hermit must have possessed the supernatural power of disappearing in the solid rock, which some had attributed to him. At all events, the Hermit was never yet known to be cornered either within or without the cavern. Either the multiplicity of ramifications with which he seemed perfectly familiar, enabled him always to find a means of eluding pursuit in the cavern; and a fertility of expedients enabled him to set the devices of his enemies at defiance in the open mountains

and elsewhere; or else he possessed a portion of the arts of the goblin inhabitants of the wonderful cave.

The Hermit requested the party to become seated, and extinguish their torches, while he would reconnoiter. For two hours they sat in total darkness, while the Hermit was absent. They whiled away the time by conversing in low tones of the wonderful things they had seen in the cavern. It seemed as though they had lived a whole lifetime since they entered the cave on that morning. Their minds had been perplexed with the strangest problems ever presented to man. And no sooner did they apparently get one of these mysterious problems solved, than something arose to throw all their calculations into chaos, and leave them more involved in mystery than ever. Was this cave the especial abode of goblins? Was the Hermit of the Catskills in league with these? Were the Hermit's party common, human beings like themselves? Was Horace Lackfathe a congenial spirit with the genii of the cave? Were the strange apparitions which they had seen, spirits of the blest, or goblins of perdition? Were the Leech Club in any way connected with these apparently supernatural agencies? It hardly appeared that they were; for the Hermit and his party, as well as Horace Lackfathe, were enemies of the Club. But then it might be that there were two sets of supernatural agencies in this wonderful cave. The hideous demons whom the officers first encountered, might be goblins of evil, and allies of the Leech Club, while the Hermit and his friends might be connected with good spirits, seeking to checkmate the wicked deeds of the evil ones. Such were the multiplicity of conjectures with which the minds of the officers teemed. But no amount of speculation would lead them any nearer to a solution of these mysteries.

At length the Hermit returned. As usual, he said but little. Holding a brief conference with the chief officer, the force was divided into two parties. To the largest of these, consisting of about two-thirds of the whole number, the Hermit himself acted as guide. The other party was placed under the guidance of John Woodman, who appeared to have become quite familiar with the cave. The Hermit gave John certain directions, and imparting

a watchword by which they should know each other, the two parties separated, and again there commenced a dreary march to the light of torches. The Hermit's party had not gone far, when a brief halt was called ; and then they were shown a deep, almost perpendicular hole in the floor of the cavern, into which they were to descend. Crags in the rock were the steps upon which they must climb down this dubious pit. The Hermit went first, Horace Lackfathe next, and the officers, one by one, followed. With great difficulty they descended about fifty feet, when three different passages were found running in different directions, horizontally. The Hermit requested that three trusty men be left here, and that they remain quiet, with extinguished torches, ready to arrest any one not of their own party who might come upon them. It required considerable nerve of the officers to remain in this place ; where a slow death would be the consequence, should their guide, by design or accident, fail to return to them. But the officers had become entirely passive in this exploration, and not a murmur was heard.

The Hermit then led the remainder of the party on through one of the passages. Soon they were in the open cavern, which appeared more lofty than usual. Horace Lackfathe soon discovered that they were in the deep gulf so often mentioned. Proceeding along the wall of the gulf, he stationed the men at different points within calling distance of each other, giving them instructions to conceal the light of their torches, and look out for the approach of any one not belonging to their party. The Hermit now, accompanied only by Horace Lackfathe, entered a narrow passage running laterally in the gulf wall. They proceeded in this manner for some distance, when all at once they heard a challenge coming out of the darkness. The Hermit gave the watch-word, and, to Horace's surprise, they were answered by the three men who were at first left at the bottom of the hole by which the whole party descended. The Hermit had purposely come back to this spot through another passage, hoping in this way to start out some of the Leech Club, and pen them up between two parties. But the game was not there. Reinforced by the three officers, the Hermit and Horace,

with the three, now proceeded onward in another passage.

After about ten minutes' threading of this narrow and difficult alley, the Hermit suddenly halted, and told Horace to look ahead. Just before them was a large chamber, and on the farther side of it appeared to be about a dozen men, very comfortably quartered, with torches burning, seated around a table, on which were wine and other refreshments.

"There are the men we seek!" said the Hermit; and he passed the word quietly to his party that they should spring into the chamber, display their torches, present their pistols, and demand a surrender of the gang. The movement was made, and the surprised members of the Leech Club sprang up and fled in the utmost dismay. This was what the Hermit wanted. They were more than two to one to his party, and had they stood, it is probable they would have been more than a match for them. But in flying, the Leech Club men were likely to run right into the traps which the Hermit had set for them. They disappeared into a narrow passage, and this was intersected by other passages, all of which led into the gulf. The fugitives separated into the different passages, and as they emerged in the gulf they were challenged by the officers stationed there, and several of them were captured.

The Hermit and his party continued the pursuit, driving the main portion of the fugitives before them. They at length emerged into the gulf, and they could see their prey retreating by torch-light. The Hermit now gathered to him all the officers he had stationed in the gulf, and continued the pursuit. But Horace felt that the game was already beyond their reach; for how could they expect to overtake the fugitives in the ramifications of the cavern? He was sure that he saw Mr. Swellup, Mr. Sindandy and Mr. Flitaway, the three above all others whom he desired to see brought to condign punishment. And the torches of these worthies were almost disappearing from sight in the blackness of the gulf.

But the Hermit patiently and silently led on the pursuit. The torches of the fugitives had entirely disappeared, and Horace made up his mind the game had

completely eluded them. Soon, however, he was astonished to see the torches of the fugitives returning toward their pursuers. Had they failed to find egress in that direction? and were they going to try conclusions with the officers in a deadly conflict? The fugitives came close enough to see that the strength of the Hermit's party was more than they cared to encounter, when they again turned about.

They continued their retreat till they came to the confines of the gulf, where there were craggy steps, by means of which they expected to ascend to the upper part of the cavern. Had they been able to do so, they would have been beyond pursuit. But here was an unforeseen difficulty. John Woodman's party was stationed here to intercept their retreat. The Hermit had outgeneraled them!

Seeing themselves hemmed in by a superior force, the fugitives surrendered at discretion. Mr. Sindandy was overcome with astonishment and fear as he stepped forward to surrender, and found himself the prisoner of John Woodman. Poetical justice is generally the most galling to him who tastes its bitter retribution.

And Mr. Swellup was not less astonished to find Horace Lackfathe among his pursuers, and so expressed himself.

"Indeed, Mr. Swellup," said Horace, "it may surprise you that I should have any motive to assist in ferreting you out, but I shall soon have the pleasure of introducing both you and Mr. Sindandy to those whose existence will astonish you more."

But little more was said, and the prisoners were marched forward till they reached a point opposite the chamber where Charity Faithful and Susan Clarkson were staying under the protection of Mr. Graphic. Here the party halted, and John Woodman went into the chamber, and brought the three inmates forth.

"Mr. Swellup," said Horace, "it is with the greatest pleasure I introduce to you Miss Charity Faithful, whom you doubtless thought dead. It will unquestionably be a great pleasure to you to see her still alive, enjoying fair health; though it is not your fault that she is possessed of these blessings."

There is nothing more humbling to a base man, than to present to him one of the victims of his villainy, after his power of mischief is gone. Mr. Swellup shrank to conceal his face in darkness.

"Mr. Swellup," said Charity, "if you cannot recognize me, you can at least tell me about my mother. Is she alive? or has your cruelty killed her, as it would have done with me?"

"She was alive when I left the castle a short time ago," said Mr. Swellup, sullenly.

"But your words seem to intimate that she is likely to be dead now! In the name of God, tell me how she is!" said Charity, in tones which showed her agony.

But not another word would Mr. Swellup say.

"Now, Mr. Sindandy," said Horace, "I have a surprise for you, also. Allow me to introduce to you Susan Clarkson, who is most probably your wife in the eyes of the law, notwithstanding you intended that the ceremony should be but one of mockery. I think the laws of this State recognize no such thing as a mock marriage; and that a public avowal, such as yours before a witness, is a marriage in fact. Taking this view of the case, she whom you call your wife is not legally married to you. However, Miss Clarkson does not propose to put in any claim on that score. If you are a treasure to your present spouse, her claims on you will not be interfered with, except so far as the law may take hold of you on other grounds than that of bigamy."

Mr. Sindandy wilted beneath these withering words like a plucked lily or pink in the noonday sun.

Cooking utensils were now procured from the chamber, and, with charcoal, a meal was cooked, of which the jaded officers, as well as the others, partook with relish. A spring trickled from the side of the cavern, affording excellent water. After the meal was finished, as it was far into the night, the company prepared to rest where they were till morning. The prisoners were secured; and while some kept guard, the others disposed of themselves as best they could for a few hours' rest.

When their time pieces told them that it was morning they soon made their way out of the cavern. Stopping just long enough to take a little refreshment from their

haversacks, they proceeded to the castle. The captured members of the Leech Club entered as prisoners the building where they had so often rioted in festivity.

While on the way to the castle Horace had expressed in the most fervent terms his thanks to the Hermit, and his regrets that he had ever regarded him as an enemy. The most of the way John Woodman walked in company with the Hermit. But shortly before reaching the castle, the Hermit, unobserved by any one, quietly disappeared in the forest; nobody knew whither.

CHAPTER XXV.

SORROW MINGLES IN THE CUP OF JOY.

CHARITY FAITHFUL, with Susan Clarkson and John Woodman, had remained in exile in the mountains all through the dreary winter, and until their relief through the expedition set out to arrest certain members of the Leech Club. Charity and her friends had not remained in the dreary cave but a portion of the time. John Woodman and the Hermit had erected a log hut in a secluded valley, where they spent the most of the time; thus having what little comfort could be obtained from sunlight and fresh air. Their hut was near a narrow, subterranean passage which led to the cave, into which they could retire upon the approach of danger. From the cellar of their hut a secret door opened into the passage which led to the cavern; therefore there was little danger of their being surprised and captured. The Hermit was their faithful friend, paying them frequent visits; though he never resided with them. Both John and Charity had a little money, and with this the Hermit provided a sufficient supply of provisions, before winter set, to last them till spring. The provisions were stored in a secure place in the cavern, and they only kept a small supply in the hut. With books, and

each other's society, did these three exiles while away the severe, long, dreary winter of the Catskills. Their fuel consisted of an abundant supply of charcoal, which had been previously prepared and stored in the cave. The labors of John Woodman were valuable in preparing this supply. As charcoal makes little smoke, no prowling hunter was attracted to their retreat.

It is true, they might have escaped from the mountains entirely, but they all had reasons for not leaving the Catskill region. John Woodman had a little property there, which he did not want to abandon; Susan Clarkson's parents lived not far off; Charity Faithful's mother was certain to be at the castle while the Leech Club should make that a summer resort, and she hoped thus to be able to communicate with her parent. The whole three believed that there would soon be a turn in affairs, by means of which they could bring their persecutors to justice; and they knew of no more certain way to do this than to remain near at hand, where they could take advantage of the first turn in the tide. The event showed that they judged rightly, for the very fact of their remaining here was the means of securing the capture of the miscreants who had persecuted them. It would have been worse than useless for them to have come forth from their hiding, and invoked the law, while the Leech Club was in the full blush of its power; for the courts were so completely under its control that, instead of bringing their enemies to grief, the persecuted persons would soon have found themselves imprisoned by a corrupt process of law.

When spring came, the Hermit heard reports of the prosecutions that were going on against the Leech Club, and he conveyed the news to the exiles. Hope began to find a place in their hearts. The Hermit, however, when the expedition of officers was seen in the mountains, supposed them to be connected with the Leech Club. He saw, from a secure place of observation, that Horace Lackfathe was among the number, and his previous encounters with Horace had led to the conclusion that the latter was a friend of the Club. The Hermit accordingly hurried to the hut where his three wards resided,

and conducted them into the cavern. What followed is known to the reader.

The joy of her deliverance from this terrible exile was marred on the part of Charity Faithful by the condition of her mother. Though the latter knew not exactly the fate of her daughter, she had reason to suspect that Charity was most foully treated. The canker-worm of suspense and grief had consumed her life, and when Charity was rescued, she came only in time to see her mother sink into the grave.

Charity first had the news of her arrival broken gently to her mother, and then she flew to her bed-side. She clasped an emaciated form in which the last spark of life had been set burning with unwonted fire, by the joy of meeting her long lost daughter. It is doubtful if the grief-stricken woman would have lived through that day but for the sight of her daughter. This unspeakable joy gave her a new, but short lease of life. She conversed with Charity, heard the history of her sufferings and her final rescue. How wonderful is the charity and delicacy of the dying. Though this poor, aggrieved; long-suffering woman knew that her husband had been the sole cause of her own and her daughter's troubles, she made no allusion to the fact. And Charity appreciating this fine delicacy of her dying mother, did not allude to it either; nor did she tell her that the worse than brute, who called himself her husband, was then in the castle a prisoner.

The dying woman lingered through the day, and far into the night. About midnight she called Charity and Horace Lackfathe to her bedside. Joining their hands, she placed them within her own feeble grasp, while they knelt beside her. Her lips moved in the silent utterance of a prayer that was not heard in this world; but who can doubt its import? The feeble hand relaxed. Horace and Charity arose weeping. The lips which had blessed them were still forever, and the heart which forgave the greatest of injuries, had ceased to throb with the grief which had worn it out.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A TRIAL WHICH WAS NOT HELD BEFORE THE GRINDING COURT.

MR. SWELLUP, Mr. Sindandy, and the others who were captured in the cavern, were held as prisoners in the castle until the remains of Charity Faithful's mother were removed to the city where she had resided, and where the funeral services took place. Charity departed from the hated castle with the remains of her mother, but it was necessary for Horace Lackfathe to remain and look after the disposal of the prisoners.

Previous to her departure, Charity had sworn out a warrant before the nearest magistrate, against Mr. Swellup for kidnaping; while Susan Clarkson had a similar one issued against Mr. Sindandy; and John Woodman obtained the issuing of a warrant against Mr. Sindandy and Mr. Flitaway for conspiracy, in procuring his false imprisonment.

The officers had arrested these men in the cavern for the misappropriation of the public funds. Mr. Shoe-man was again called on to procure bail for them, and by the most persistent efforts he managed to do so. They then thought they were again free, but instantly Mr. Swellup, Mr. Sindandy, and Mr. Flitaway were arrested on the warrants for kidnaping and conspiracy. No more bail was at hand, and they were consigned to the jail of one of the counties in the Catskill region.

"Now," said Horace Lackfathe to Mr. Graphic, "we have these foul birds, these cormorants and buzzards caged?"

"True," said Mr. Graphic, "they are caged, but we cannot tell at what minute the door will be opened for them to fly where they list."

"But the county court will hardly be as lenient to them as the city courts which they have so long owned."

"That depends on circumstances. I am told that the District Attorney of this county is a personal friend of

Mr. Shoeman. If that is so, I am afraid he will not push the prosecution very vigorously against that gentleman's son-in-law."

"Can it be possible," said Horace with all the bitterness of his distrust of human nature returning, "that such scoundrels can be saved by their friends?"

"We have seen that such is the case in the city; for notwithstanding the prosecutions of the Leech Club there, it has thus far proved almost impossible to inflict on any of them the full severity of the law. They have managed so adroitly to extend their circle of *friendship* that, while the courts are disposed to put a bar to their further mischief, there is no court in the city but that some of its members in some way feel friendly to the Leech Club—or at least don't feel disposed to deal too harshly with it."

"And, Mr. Graphic, you blame me for placing so little faith in the world, while you admit that things are just as rotten as I have ever intimated!"

"Well, perhaps they are, but seeing that we have no other world than this at present, I think it our duty to enjoy it the best we can, and not let its corruptness trouble us too much."

"I have considerable hope," said Horace, "that something like justice may be done in this case. The friendships that Mr. Shoeman may bring to bear will be somewhat counteracted by the detestation in which the Leech Club are held in this community. Their infamous treatment of John Woodman and Susan Clarkson has not placed the Club very high in the estimation of the people in this section."

"There, I am afraid, you will again be mistaken. The Leech Club have been rich and powerful here. They have scattered their gold freely like water. The recipients of it, though they now know it to have been stolen, still feel a sort of *friendship* for those who were so liberal. Human nature is so constituted that such things will have their force."

"But the Club has gone out in such a culmination of villainies that I think human nature will assert itself in its other phase—a feeling of revenge and retribution for wrongs done."

"There, I think you miscalculate human nature a little. This I have observed: that mankind have an irresistible inclination to side with the weaker party, be it even a thief and murderer pursued with the overwhelming force of the law. Frequently you hear of men perpetrating the blackest crimes without any apparent provocation. The community are furious for the most rigorous punishment of the criminal until he is captured and lodged in jail. Then they begin to relax their indignation a little. He is now the weaker party. Men begin to sympathize with, and frame excuses for him. His crime may have been the murder and robbery of a whole family. By the time he is brought into court, the sympathy for the victims has almost entirely subsided. Their sufferings have passed, and the sympathy is transferred to the criminal. He is looked upon as subject to a cruel treatment. The chances are that there is now a much greater sympathy felt for him than for the victims whom he hurried out of the world. Now let a prosecuting officer flag a little in vigor, and a judge give a lenient charge in regard to the prisoner! The probability is that the jury will give way to this mawkish sympathy, and bring in a verdict of manslaughter in the second or third degree, or perhaps acquit the prisoner entirely. It is true that the jury will afterwards be utterly ashamed of their weakness, but it is then too late to mend the matter."

"But," said Horace, "in the trial of these Leech Club villains, we will have present in court some of the victims of their cruelty. Surely these suffering, innocent persons, should excite rather more sympathy than the criminals who persecuted them."

"It would seem so; but there is the consideration that the sufferings of these victims are now over, while the criminals are in danger of punishment. So, poor, weak humanity will incline to sympathy with those whose deserved sufferings are imminent, and forget the unmerited tribulations of those who are now comparatively out of trouble. It might not be so if the prosecuting officers would do their whole duty, without regard to friendships, which I fear they will not." [It would seem that Mr. Graphic had imperceptibly fallen into

Horace's method of reasoning, as recorded in a previous chapter.]

The trial was brought on with unusual promptness. The prisoners were in durance, and their friends believed that they would have no great difficulty in getting them acquitted; or at all events let off with a moderate fine. An able criminal lawyer was procured to defend them, and it was generally believed that the prosecuting attorney would not push them too hard. Many legal gentlemen will perhaps consider this a scandalous statement, but the truth of it was not only obvious in this case—the same thing, we regret to say, may be observed in too many of our courts. Only let a prisoner have *friends*, and see how easy it is to stave off his trial and get him out on bail; when he stands a good chance never to be brought into court again.

At the trial of Mr. Swellup, Mr. Sindandy and Mr. Flitaway for kidnapping and conspiracy, all the *finesse* known to lawyers was practiced to make friendships tell in their favor. It was managed to get jurymen selected who were known to be friends of Mr. Shoeman. And the daughter of that gentleman, the wife of Mr. Sindandy, was present in court to excite sympathy. It was the most exciting trial that ever took place in that county. The court room was crowded, and large numbers were unable to gain admittance. Many of the jurors were challenged, but this did not seem to discompose the defendants, as the entire panel was composed of those whom they believed to be their friends. With one of the ablest criminal lawyers of the day, supported by another of almost equal ability, the defense seemed to have everything its own way.

Opposed to this strong array, there was only the District Attorney of the county—a young man of little experience and moderate ability. And besides, as has been intimated, he was thought to be on too friendly terms with Mr. Shoeman, and therefore likely to sympathize with that gentleman's son-in-law. It verily seemed that the scoundrels who had kidnapped Charity Faithful and Susan Clarkson; cast a stigma upon John Woodman by having him sent to the penitentiary, breaking up his home; virtually murdering his mother as well as the

mother of Charity Faithful—it verily seemed that these outlaws, dyed in crime, were about to overreach their victims in a county court where one might think it would be the easiest thing in the world to convict them.

As the proceedings were about to commence, a request was made by John Woodman, that Horace Lackfathe, who was legally qualified to practice in that court, should be associated in the prosecution with the District Attorney, stating that it should be without expense to the county. There could be no objection to this request, and it was granted. Everything was now ready. The wife of Mr. Sindandy sat within sight of the jury, looking pale and careworn. Near by was also seated John Woodman, Charity Faithful and Susan Clarkson. Just back of these, veiled, was Phebe Greenwood.

It is not our intention to give the details of the trial. It was conducted on the part of the defense much as many other bad causes have been, by shrewd lawyers, who rely almost entirely on friendship, and their ability to muddle matters, having really no evidence to produce. On the other hand, the case of the prosecution was perfectly clear. The evidence was conclusive and unimpeachable.

The able counsel for the defense, in making their plea, hardly attempted to controvert the facts so clearly proven. And still they made a remarkably specious plea. It consisted chiefly of artful and plausible sophistries, well calculated to bewilder an inexperienced jury. The countrymen had never heard such learned arguments before. Every one was astounded. People looked at each other, as if saying by their looks: “How could any one ever think of convicting these excellent men of these crimes?” for their lawyers made the prisoners out to be the greatest Christians, the most active and liberal philanthropists, and the most genial, social citizens who ever graced the republic. As the last, and most able of the prisoners’ counsel concluded, there was a resigned expression among the audience, as if they had made up their minds as to the innocence of the prisoners, and their consequent acquittal; there was a beneficent smile on the countenances of the jurymen, as if they had already made up their

minds on a verdict of not guilty; and there was a look of triumph on the countenance of the wife of Mr. Sindandy and her sympathizing friends; and a corresponding depression among the victims of the Leech Club's villainy.

The District Attorney, a mere stripling in appearance, as he proved himself to be in ability, at least on that occasion, followed for the prosecution. He put forth a very weak argument, which did not in the least alter the impression made by the defense. In fact, neither the audience nor the jury scarcely noticed him. It was like the squib of a pop-gun after a salvo of heavy artillery. The burthen of his effort was that a small fine should be inflicted on the accused, to sustain the dignity of the laws.

The District Attorney sat down, having done about as much toward moving the audience or the jury from their previously fixed convictions, as a pebble thrown in mid-ocean would toward agitating it into foaming waves. The judge was about to charge the jury, when Horace Lackfathe arose. The friends of the prisoners looked at each other and smiled, as much as to say: "Let him go on, he won't hurt much." What could that pale, slim young man do to overcome the arguments of the massive and brilliant counsel of the defense?

Horace commenced in the usual formal style of the courts, not in a loud voice, nor yet with any appearance of embarrassment. He spoke slowly at first, but in a clear voice, and the audience and jury did not treat him with exactly the same indifference that they had the District Attorney. They at least deigned to look at him. Soon he warmed up, as he commenced to review the evidence. He placed the facts which had been proven so clearly before the jury that they could not help but see them. He showed that it had been proved beyond all question that the prisoners had committed some of the highest crimes known to our laws. Then he asked the jury if the defense had brought one jot of rebutting testimony, or if they had impeached any of the witnesses of the prosecution? No, they had ignored this, the real issue, and insulted the good sense of the jury by presuming that they were so ignorant as not to be able to see through the weakness of the defense. Then he showed the jury how clearly it had been proved beyond all con-

tradiction that the prisoners had been guilty of crimes which called for a verdict that should consign them to a long imprisonment at hard labor.

He then took hold of the sophistries of the learned counsel of the defense. These were dissolved beneath his burning, logical eloquence like hoar-frost before the scorching breath of a locomotive. He took hold of their false, specious arguments as a whirlwind snatching a rotten sheet from the line, tearing it into shreds, and casting the tatters at the feet of the jury. A few minutes previously, the defense had placed before the jury a splendid castle in the air; which they hoped would stand the light air-guns which they thought were alone at hand to be brought against it. But it fell like a cob-house as Horace merely probed it with his stiletto. It seemed to the prisoners that they had only been mocked with the evanescent fabric of a dream, which vanished as they awakened and were about to grasp it. They were like men who had vainly thought to shield their backs from scourging blasts, by throwing over them the frail fabric of the spider's web, which proves to be scarcely an improvement on nothing, as one attempts to draw it about his shoulders. In concluding, Horace addressed the jury in a more general way. Though much of what he said was a repetition of ideas which he had before advanced in conversation with Mr. Graphic, as recorded in a previous chapter, we give a few extracts from his peroration.

"Gentlemen of the jury," said he, "there never was, nor ever can be, a clearer case than this. If you do not give the verdict for the people in this case, then our criminal laws may as well be swept from the statute books, or at least amended so as to read: 'None but the poor and friendless are amenable to these laws. All who have powerful friends to employ for them able counsel, shall be deemed privileged against these enactments, and no verdict must be brought against such, or at least, only in a modified form.' I pray you, gentlemen, do not allow a stigma to fall upon the administration of justice in this county, like that which disgraces the city whence these prisoners have imbibed their civil morals. They came here among you, gentlemen, thinking to practice with impunity in these pure hills all the iniquities that

have cursed the city which they have so long misgoverned. Teach such criminal interlopers that they must carry their nefarious doings to another theater of action. Teach them that this is not a healthy locality for rogues, however rich they may be with the stolen money of the people.

“Gentlemen of the jury, which of you can doubt that, were these men poor and friendless, they would have received the full penalty of their crimes, without all this ado? Suppose some vagrant Gypsies had abducted your daughters, and after first endeavoring to consign them to a house of ill-fame, had then imprisoned them in a gloomy cavern, the terrors of which have made the stoutest hearts quail! And suppose these same outlaw Gypsies had inveigled into their net one of your most promising sons, and by false accusations contrived to have him sent to the penitentiary! The mothers of these victims pine away, and die of hearts broken by the cruel fate of their children. Do any of you doubt that the outlaws who committed these iniquitous acts would be condemned to the utmost penalties of the law? Oh! yes you say, a band of beggarly Gypsies or other scum of society, who should commit such heinous crimes, would find little mercy in this court. Gentlemen of the jury, look at the prisoners!” and Horace pointed at them with an energy that caused the audience fairly to shriek, as if they expected to see a thunderbolt dart from the tips of his fingers and strike the culprits lifeless on the spot; while his eyes flashed as if with the lightning preceding the thunder which was about to roll; and the prisoners quailed before his withering gaze. “They,” said Horace, “have committed just such a crime as that supposed of the vagrant outlaws, in a thrice aggravated form. There, gentlemen, are some of their victims!” said Horace, pointing to the seat where Charity Faithful and the others sat. “You see there at least two with whom some of you are personally acquainted. There is John Woodman, your respected townsman; who, in times not long ago, had, like you, a snug home in one of the picturesque valleys of these mountains. He had a widowed mother, who doted on him, but she is not here. These splendid gentlemen who are now arraigned before the bar of this

court, dug her grave, after they had first consigned her son to a living tomb by a foul conspiracy. And there is a young woman, known to many of you as the virtuous daughter of one of your esteemed and worthy neighbors. That mincing hypocrite"—pointing to Mr. Sindandy—"not satisfied with the breaking up of the Woodman family, lured the poor girl to her ruin by a mock marriage; then endeavored to consign her to a house of ill-fame which was kept by an esteemed friend of his; and next imprisoned her in the gloomy cavern in the mountains. And, gentlemen, there is another lady, not known to you, who was a companion to your townswoman in this hellish imprisonment. She shared with her the remorseless persecution of these culprits. That bloated criminal, fattened to his present proportions on the hard earnings of you all, and rifled from your pockets in the shape of taxes, was the step-father of this young woman. Her widowed mother married this man, not knowing his true standing, and brutal nature. And did he prove a husband to the one, and a father to the other? No, gentlemen, he contracted this marriage for the same base purpose that he enters the public service—for plunder! Both this young woman and her mother had a handsome property. That wretch wished to marry the daughter of his wife to one of his kind. But she had learned the nature of these men, and she preferred burial alive—for such it was—in the cave of terrors, to such a marriage. Not even the mother dying of grief before his eyes could soften the heart of this chief of the Leech Club. He had learned to value money as the source of his power and gaudy splendor, and when that was at stake, the life, happiness and liberty of others was naught; his vows at the altar to sustain and cherish her to whom he had solemnly promised to be a husband, were no more regarded than his oath of office when he found it necessary to steal a million dollars or so from the public treasury, in order to keep up the scandalous splendor which has stirred up an outraged people to drive him and his clique from power.

"Thus you see, gentlemen of the jury, while these men stand before you convicted kidnappers and conspirators, they are also virtually murderers of the mothers of

two of the victims whom they have so foully treated. The mother of John Woodman is seen among you no more; her cottage and farm are as desolate as if a band of savage and merciless Bedouins of the desert had trodden out every spark of life upon it, beneath the feet of their chargers. The mother of Charity Faithful was fairly scourged through the portals of the tomb by the brute who should have been her protector.

“Now, gentlemen of the jury, will you set free on these hills, criminals whose souls are damned with perjury, and whose hands are dyed in blood? Will you send forth from this hall these Arab banditti to flout the cottage which is desolated by their murder, and the farm which is growing up with brambles, because the sturdy hand which would have tilled it was sent to penal confinement by their base conspiracy? No, gentlemen, disgrace not your own county by such a verdict as that.

“Be not seduced from the performance of your duty, gentlemen, by the splendor of these criminals. Even if their glitter was not the fruit of public robbery, it would be no excuse for meting out to them a less punishment than their crimes merit. Gentlemen, I am sure, if these men were ragged, vagrant outlaws, there would be no necessity for an elaborate appeal for their conviction. The bare evidence would be sufficient. And in making this assertion, I would cast no reproach upon the intelligence and honesty of the jury. The fault is not yours, gentlemen, that this is the case. The fault is with the manner in which, for years past, our criminal laws have been administered. It has, I shame to say, become a common understanding, that every rich and powerful criminal, or one who possesses powerful friends who stand by him, is in some manner to escape punishment. Very few men who have robbed and embezzled to the extent of hundreds of thousands, find their way within the penal walls. To say nothing about the direct corruption which has been charged upon some courts, and which I know does not prevail in this, there seems to be a disposition to save all criminals who have wealth, apparent respectability, or an extensive circle of friends, from the rigor of the laws. No matter how plain the case, by some sort of legal legerdemain, they escape.

“There are, for the safety and discipline of society, few enough criminals punished under any circumstances—either low-bred or aristocratic criminals. This false, disorganizing friendship, comes in to save the larger portion of those who prey upon the industrious, or wreak their unrighteous vengeance on the unoffending, or beguile the innocent into their toils to minister to their baseness. But, while the most of those who incur the rigor of the laws doubtless deserve their fate, they are infinitely less guilty than the ten times larger number who are saved from punishment by the mal-administration of the statutes. The poor and friendless must bear the whole brunt of serving as examples to law-breakers. They alone must wear the penal garb, and wield the penal bar in the quarry, in order that the world may see that ‘The way of the transgressor is hard.’ Gentlemen, that passage should be altered in these modern times to read: ‘The way of the poor and friendless transgressor is hard.’ Why, gentlemen, in the way the laws have been administered for some years past, if we had no poor and friendless, there would be none punished at all, crime would hold high carnival, and there would be no condemned criminals whom we might point out to outlaws, and say: ‘There is what your transgressions will bring you to unless you cease your lawless career.’ Society is suffering infinitely more from the wholesale criminals who escape punishment, than from the comparatively petty criminals who fill our prisons. If we would redeem society from its great demoralization, we must punish the thief who steals millions as well as the one who steals hundreds.

“Gentlemen, I have little more to say. The prisoners are not on trial here for the tremendous robberies they have committed from the public funds. You have heard how hard it is to get an adequate verdict against them for their financial crimes. Powerful friends shield them from the full rigor of the laws. Shall it be so here? The crimes that have been proven against them in this court are personal ones against the individuals who are here before you. The prisoners stand convicted directly of kidnapping and conspiracy, while indirectly they are virtually guilty of murder. You, gentlemen of the jury,

can only take cognizance of what has been proven against them here. As you can have no measure of doubt of their guilt in the face of the evidence, we ask you to give an unmitigated verdict. So shall the kidnappers and conspirators be punished; and in their capacity of murderers, although the sentence will not be inflicted for that, they can be measurably punished, by giving them the utmost penalty of the law for the crimes for which they are convicted; and again, if they feel that the court has been unusually severe in its sentence, they may consider that in their capacity of public robbers, they merited a still greater punishment. In any event they will get off with less than their deserts. Now, gentlemen, I conjure you to do your duty to yourselves, your oaths, your consciences, and to the people; vindicate the characters of these, your fellow townsmen, by showing to the world that those who conspired to consign John Woodman to the penitentiary, were ruffianly outlaws; and that the counterfeit gentleman who lured Susan Clarkson to ruin, was a most designing knave."

Horace sat down amid a clamor of applause, which the court checked. The countenances of the prisoners and their friends, which had appeared so elated in the early part of the trial, were now blanched as if a panic had seized their souls. The eyes of Mr. Sindandy's wife and those of Phebe Greenwood happened to meet, when a pardonable expression of triumph was visible on the countenance of the latter.

The judge gave a brief charge, and the jury retired. They were out but a few minutes, when they returned with a verdict of GUILTY!

There was no visible change on the countenances of the prisoners on hearing the verdict. They had, for some time past, settled down into a calm despair, and they were not at all surprised at their conviction. No one was surprised. Any other verdict would have created the utmost astonishment.

The prisoners were removed to their cells. The next day Mr. Sindandy, Mr. Swellup, and Mr. Flitaway were each sentenced to imprisonment at hard labor for the period of fifteen years. A few days afterwards, the three,

linked together with handcuffs, were taken from the county jail to the State prison.

When the trial was over, and the court adjourned, the friends of John Woodman gathered around him, and almost bore him on their shoulders from the court room. And the friends of Susan Clarkson, now feeling that her character was vindicated, tendered her their warmest congratulations. Charity Faithful walked forth clinging to the arm of Horace Lackfathe. Poor Mary Shoe-man, weeping, and supported by the arm of her father, was assisted to a carriage and driven home. Phebe Greenwood, after a brief interview with John Woodman, departed for home in her father's conveyance.

Horace and Charity, Susan Clarkson and John Woodman, gathered in a little group outside of the court house. Soon there stepped forth from the crowd a tall, dark man, dressed in ordinary garb, and walked toward them. They all rushed to meet him, for it was the Hermit of the Catskills. They seized hold of his hands, his arms and his garments, and fairly showered upon him thanks and compliments.

"My dear, good Hermit," said Horace, "do come and spend the evening with us at our hotel! We have spent together so many hours of tumult, let us at least have a short season of quiet and peaceful communion."

"I am sorry I cannot gratify you," said the Hermit. "We can just as well say good-bye here, now that we must part! perhaps forever! which means till we meet in another world! Let me say, young man"—addressing Horace—"that I am amply compensated in witnessing the noble part you have performed in this day's proceedings, for any little misunderstanding that has existed between us. If my own poor services to your friends have atoned for any wrong I have unintentionally done you in word, thought or act, then our unpremeditated, and slight grievances are offset."

"Indeed," said Horace, "we owe you all this happiness which we now possess! and we beg you to allow us to confer upon you some token of our great esteem."

"I want no token but your good opinion," said the Hermit, "and as I see you think not ill of the Hermit of the Catskills, I will now bid you good-bye!"

"Not yet! not yet!" said they all, clinging to his arms and the skirts of his coat.

"My children," said the Hermit, "there is nothing more that I would say to you. You need my aid no longer. Nor is there any more work for us to do in concert. My mission is ended here in the Catskills. To-morrow I depart to join my people again in the far West. To-night I must prepare for my journey. So, GOOD-BYE!"

They all flung themselves upon the stoical Hermit, shaking his hands and embracing him, and with sobs uttering their adieus. Charity Faithful managed to disengage a gold chain from her own neck, and to throw it about that of the Hermit. He did not attempt to return it, but entwined it in the fingers of his left hand, thus showing that he recognized the token, while with the other hand he waved them a last farewell, and walked calmly away. They watched him till he was out of sight, when they turned sadly to their quarters in the hotel.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

A FEW days after the events recorded in the previous chapter, the castle of the Leech Club, in the Catskills, was destroyed by fire. As all the valuable furniture had previously been removed, it was surmised that the Club themselves had burned the building. Their glory had departed, and they doubtless desired to leave no monument of their ignominy in the vicinity. All the iron that had been used in the construction of the building was gathered from the ruins, carted away and sold. The walls of the castle were demolished, and soil and mould thrown upon the *debris*. Few persons would now suspect that the pile of stones partially covered with earth and moss, which now occupies the site of the ruins,

was once a gorgeous mansion, the scene of junketing and gaiety, and the dwelling of men who for a time held the destinies of a great State in their hands with the seeming power and security of an Oriental despot. The beautiful lake in front of the castle was drained by tearing away the artificial dam which had been placed across the gorge to retain the waters of the noisy stream. This dam had been constructed in a manner to make the lake appear as a natural one, but from the facility with which it was torn away it was plainly artificial, and the work of the Leech Club. Thus the spot which had been the scene of such rounds of festivity was left in a state as wild as any other solitary dell of the mountains. The road, or rather trail, which led to the castle, was soon overgrown with bushes, so as to be hardly distinguishable.

There was now little left of the Leech Club in the Catskill region except Mr. Shoeman. The jobs by which he was to be indemnified for his unprecedented election expenses, had come to naught with the men who had inaugurated that system of public robbery. And Mr. Shoeman had become so greatly involved in backing up the members of the Club during the prosecutions against them, that when they irretrievably fell, he was a ruined man financially. He managed to save only a few thousand dollars from his hard-earned and once splendid fortune. And with this miserable remnant, Mr. Shoeman emigrated to the far West with his family. There were some monuments of corruption, such as the so-called "improvement of Saxafax Creek," which Mr. Shoeman did not care to have staring him in the face and accusing him, during the remainder of his life. So he sorrowfully left the scene of his life-long toil and honest success in accumulating a fortune; which slipped through his fingers like volatile mercury as soon as he allied himself with thieves.

Mr. Shoeman's son-in-law, Mr. Sindandy, lost his life in an attempt to escape from prison, soon after his incarceration.

About a year after Horace Lackfathe figured so prominently in the trial of the Leech Club prisoners, he again, in the same county, appeared as one of the chief person-

ages on another not less interesting, but more auspicious occasion. And there are present the self-same individuals whose case he so ably advocated at the trial.' John Woodman has regained the ruddy health of his native hills, and he is otherwise much improved in appearance. His brow has assumed somewhat of the thoughtful look common to men engaged in intellectual pursuits, adding to his physiognomy a sort of quiet dignity. Susan Clarkson is again a rosy-cheeked country lass, as sprightly as the wild flowers of the mountains after a refreshing rain; though she is not one of the central figures on this, as she was on the former occasion. Mr. Graphic is also one of the company, his clear eye and radiant smile indicating that he has weighed mankind, and settled down into a benevolent trust in them as a whole, notwithstanding the aberrations of so many from the path of rectitude.

The central figures among the female part of the assemblage were Charity Faithful and Phebe Greenwood. They were dressed in white, flowing robes, and were attended, the former by Horace Lackfathe, and the latter by John Woodman. The scene was in an old-fashioned country church; and a plainly dressed audience filled the rustic pews. There were no bridesmaids nor grooms-men. None were needed in a DOUBLE WEDDING.

Horace Lackfathe, with Charity Faithful on his arm, led the way down the uncarpeted aisle, followed by John Woodman and Phebe Greenwood; and there was a low murmur of approbation among the assemblage. This was speedily hushed as the clergyman's voice was heard opening the ceremony to unite these two happy couples in the holy bands of wedlock.

But it is needless to pursue this subject further. Horace and Charity, though residing in the city, had acceded to Phebe Greenwood's request to visit the country in order that their nuptial ceremony might be performed at the same time that Phebe and John Woodman were married. While Horace's eye still retained somewhat of its thoughtful, gloomy expression of distrust and doubt, it was quite evident that the fair being by his side held as large a share of his faith as she could desire, however he might doubt the intrinsic worth of all the rest of the world. Charity had a fine property left, notwithstanding

the drafts made upon it through the unfortunate alliance of her mother. But the active mind of Horace could not remain idle. He resumed the practice of his profession in the city, becoming noted for an uncompromising antagonism against all maladministration of the law for the benefit of criminals—especially great rogues whose powerful friends endeavored to shield from the just consequences of their crimes.

John Woodman rose rapidly to distinction in the legal profession in his own county. His fellow-citizens soon elected him county judge. At the very first court at which he presided, an individual, who had once figured prominently in the castle of the Leech Club, who, becoming a vagabond, and, wandering back into the county, there committed some crime, was sentenced by John to confinement in the State prison. Thus the prophecy of Phebe Greenwood, now the wife of John, was fulfilled.

Susan Clarkson entirely recovered her standing in the community, and shortly married a thrifty farmer.

Mr. Graphic profited well by his stay in the Catskills, for he soon achieved the reputation of being one of the first painters of natural scenery in the country.

The question may here be asked, is the Leech Club utterly broken up and destroyed? We fear not. While the center of its power is broken, its branches still exist in all parts of the country. All government officers or legislators, either State or National, who manage to obtain perquisites not legitimately belonging to their salaries, either by collusion with contractors, or as bribes or presents from persons interested in legislation; all town or county officers who exact or accept other than their legal fees, either from the public or from individuals; all persons in the employ of merchants, banking or other public institutions, who unlawfully use the funds intrusted to their care for private speculation; merchants and bankers themselves who take advantage of the public necessities, corruptly to manipulate the market, lock up money, and enrich themselves, regardless of the ruin and misery of others; in short, all who aim to support themselves as parasites on the community—to obtain the proceeds of the labor of their fellow-men by some sort of chicanery

other than honest work—to live, not as those adding anything to the common stock of wealth, but as grabbers of the productions of others, leeches on the body politic—all these properly belong to the Leech Club.

It must not be inferred that only those are members of the Leech Club who swindle on a large scale. The operations of the Club are extended down into county and town affairs. The leeches who absorb public and private substance are found in the lowest walks of life, as well as the highest; in the most humble political positions as well as the most exalted. Just as the ship-master, who has several large leaks in his vessel to contend with, is apt to neglect the thousands of smaller ones, and thus see his vessel swamped in a manner to him unaccountable, so the public are likely, in view of wholesale plunder in State or National Government, to overlook the thousands of peccadilloes of their county and town officers that are constantly going on at their very doors. How often is it a matter of wonder that, with high local taxes, the thoroughfares are anything but thorough, and the bridges are mere dead-falls, to catch the unwary tax-payers, who have so culpably allowed the local leeches to swindle the tottering structures of the funds that would have made them safe and substantial. There are those who believe that the sum total of the life blood of the commonwealth drawn from the public funds by the innumerable army of small officials, who are expected to guard the destinies of town and county, is greater in the aggregate than that abstracted by all the operations on a larger scale, practiced by the more dignified officials who administer the affairs of State and Nation. And we find, in small affairs as in greater ones, the same ramification of chief leeches, and secondary blood-suckers. The chief leech is perhaps the official, who has the handling of the funds, and the dispensing of contracts. The secondary suckers are the friends of the official, who are allowed to draw what blood there is left in the body politic, after the chief has been satiated. For instance, an official whose duty it is to take care of the unclaimed dead, or hold inquests on those who die by accident, perhaps has a needy friend, a physician, who has not been very

successful in doctoring the living. So to help him along, the official calls him in to attend the dead, who are not so particular as to the physician who ministers to them. The town or county pays a liberal fee, the patient finds no fault, and the practitioner is happy, snapping his fingers in the faces of the less appreciative living patients. Again, an official, contracting for the construction of some local public work, has an understanding with the dealer who furnishes the materials, as well as the contractor, all dividing profits and commissions, and altogether forming a harmonious coterie, being proportionately happy to the amount of pap which their generous mother, the public, places in their dish, to the exclusion of the rest of the family.

"Commission" is one of the most beneficent words in our language. Only for it, many of the transactions constantly practiced by members of the Leech Club would be designated by a much harsher name. For instance, an official whose duty it is to purchase articles for public use, exacts from the dealer a certain amount of money for his own benefit. Now, but for the convenient word, "commission," this transaction would be called stealing on the part of the official, and collusion on the part of the dealer; for there are people who say that whatever deduction is made from the articles purchased, belongs to the public. Men employed at a stated salary by private individuals, often find opportunities to make "commissions" in the same manner, which profits would be characterized by the same harsh term, but for that excellent word, "commission;" for otherwise, all such profits belong to the employer. But it must be borne in mind that such gains are only legitimate to the members of the Leech Club, who first invented the word, "commission," as applied to transactions that are essentially stealing. Not content with throwing a goodly portion of the taxes collected into the lap of its friends, the Leech Club numbers among its membership many assessors of taxes, who assess much above their fair proportion certain individuals or corporations who have little chance of redress, and thus relieve their more favored friends of the burden. And so the transactions of the Club may be brought into every house-

hold, and men need not look further than their own door-sills to find the operations of this mysterious organization. Their nearest neighbor, the staid assessor, the law-abiding and law-dispensing justice-of-the-peace, the dignified supervisor, the doleful coroner, may be an unsuspected member of the Leech Club, all knowing each other by the mystic password, as potent in affording plunder, as the "*Open Sesame*" of the Forty Thieves.

The people have become accustomed to the every-day bleeding practiced by the leeches, but they tremble whenever any large public work is to be carried on. For they know, in any large expenditure of the public funds, at least one dollar will be abstracted by the leeches for every dollar that is legitimately expended; and they consider themselves favored if they get off as well as that.

Should this narrative lead to the conclusion that the Leech Club is entirely destroyed, then it will have been worse than written in vain. Better that the notes and memorandum of Horace Lackfathe, who furnished materials for it, had been lost in the gulf of the gloomy cavern, where he well-nigh lost his life, than we should arrive at such a "lame and impotent conclusion." This tale but recites the doings of a few, comparatively, of that noted Club, showing to what extent they will push their operations when let alone by the indolent public, whose duty it is to see that they are better served. It must be kept in mind that the members of the Club are not confined to any locality. There is no State free from their manipulations, and they have a strong footing in the halls of the National Government. It is not necessary that we shall specify wherein the Club have aught to do in manipulating our National affairs. The reader has only to reflect for a moment, and he will readily classify such and such operations as the undoubted work of the Leech Club. In this narrative, only a few of the more prominent operations of the Club have been related incidentally as a part of the tale; and it was not the intention to give a thorough account of their manipulations. That would be much beyond the scope of a work of such limited dimensions. But just as the white-capped wave in the distance may point out the

location of a long line of breakers, so this small ripple may remind the reader that a powerful undercurrent is constantly tending to sap the foundations of government and society; that the Leech Club are neither dead nor sleeping.

While it is not probable that the Leech Club will be entirely annihilated till the Millennium comes, the only way in which they can be kept in check is obvious. Honest men must universally take part in public affairs. How few consider it worth while for them to attend the primary meetings, where their rulers are virtually chosen. They generally leave this part of the work to be done by a small clique of designing men, who, in many cases, wield a power equal to that of the favored aristocracy during the feudal ages. If people expect to reap the full advantages of a republican government, they must not be too indolent to perform the duties of freemen. If they leave the administration of public affairs to knaves, they can expect nothing less than to be plundered and oppressed.

Human nature is not greatly different from what it was in the days of the Roman republic. Men grasp for power and spoils now, as they did then. So long as the Roman people were vigilant, no tyrant could elevate himself upon the ruins of their liberty. But when they became rich and indolent, a Sylla, a Marius, a Cæsar, or a Nero, could hold despotic sway, and the rich, indolent citizens looked on indifferently, so long as they were suffered to retain enough of their substance to live in luxurious ease; even though their nearest neighbors fell beneath the proscription, and they were not sure whose turn might come next. We have seen, in the case of the Leech Club, how completely, even in this so-called "enlightened age," a few aggressive men may get the whole community by the throat. They were, for a time, as absolute masters of the commonwealth as were Sylla or Nero. And the people of this country may expect that cliques will continue in attempts to do the same thing, until men shall cease to love power and lucre, and the devil shall forget his cunning. A good government is only secured by means of safeguards, and when the people cease to give the necessary attention to public affairs,

to exclude professional knaves from office, then the administration thereof will fall into the hands of tyrants. In Rome, generally, a single tyrant held sway, and, supported by an army, it was the harder to dislodge him. In our own country, when the people abdicate the administration of affairs, from indolence or negligence, then a clique of tyrants take the government in hand, and being likely to disagree among themselves, they are the easier ousted through the ballots of the awakened freemen; but the clique may be able to do an immeasurable amount of mischief before power can be wrested from their hands. All this immense waste of the public substance, and demoralization of the community, might be avoided if the people would only exercise a constant vigilance, and never allow the knaves to obtain control. As often as our people act on the assumption that the human race is so far improved that the mass of citizens may sink into indolent repose, and leave the administration of general and local government to a few active men, who take an interest in such things, just so often will they incur the risk of being robbed and oppressed. There are few so good that power may be safely put into their hands without checks and safeguards. The chief difference between the men of "this enlightened age," and those of ancient times, when a Roman Consul at the head of a victorious army, thought nothing of turning the arms of his legions against his own country, establishing himself as supreme dictator, massacring thousands of citizens, and confiscating their property to reward his myrmidons, is this: Modern statesmanship has invented greater safeguards to prevent the consummation of such treacherous acts, and he who attempts them is more likely to proceed to his own ruin. To make men honest, we must make it disadvantageous for them to be dishonest. But with all the improved governmental machinery of "this enlightened age," we have seen the Leech Club, through the indifference of the freemen, make a sport and plaything of the public administration, almost as effectually as did some of the most detested tyrants of Rome. Men love power and money as well as they did of old, and are apparently just as unscrupulous as to the means of obtaining them.

In conclusion, doubtless the reader asks: "What about the apparently supernatural manifestations, so often mentioned in this tale?" These have been related just as they appeared to those who encountered them, and the reader has as much data from which to form a conclusion as the writer. We can enlighten him no further on the subject. Mysteries of this nature have perplexed all generations, and will doubtless continue to do so as long as people believe in the immortality of the soul. For, admitting that the disembodied spirit enters upon a new and active existence, there will always be those who believe that it will sometimes deign to visit the scenes of its earthly pilgrimage. If the reader should feel a disappointment that these strange matters are not cleared up in the conclusion, we suggest to him that he just call to mind all the stories of the supernatural that he ever heard, and reflect if he ever knew one to be satisfactorily explained. He will find that, in some instances, the goblin, on investigation, proved to be a shadow of some real, unobservable object, and that the strange noises were sometimes caused by an unhinged door or shutter, or the scraping of the limb of a tree on the roof of a dwelling. In other cases he will find that the strange manifestations and appearances could be accounted for in no other way than on supernatural grounds, and they seemed so well authenticated as to puzzle the learned, and confound the stubborn. Neither of these explanations is satisfactory; for when the ghostly visitant is shown to be a stump, a bush, a scarecrow in a cornfield, or a mischievous wight wrapped up in a sheet, squatting behind a tombstone, the reader thinks it is a good and marvelous story spoiled, and he is far from being satisfied; and when a ghostly tale ends, leaving all the proofs that can ever be obtained that something supernatural actually did appear, it is just as unsatisfactory. The reader wants more proof. He wants the ghost caught and caged, that he may visit him, converse with him, shake hands with him, and perhaps ask him to dinner, and make sure that he is a real ghost, and no humbug; forgetting that, in the very nature of a ghost, the visitor from the other world cannot be retained in the tightest kind of a cage that can be constructed; he could not be even bottled up and brought home, as is of-

ten done with other kinds of spirits; and as for shaking hands, the mere touch would create a doubt as to whether he was not a ghostly fraud; and as for taking dinner, it is totally out of the question. Suppose you got him seated at your table, as the ghost of Banquo was at that of Macbeth, there would not be substance enough about him to retain the food and drink. The meats, vegetables, gravy, etc., taken into his shadowy mouth would fall upon the carpet, to the great distress of the housewife. And, supposing that he was a bottled-up ghost, how could you offer him a bottle of claret, to wash down his dinner? It would only be emptying one bottle into another.

Hence the reader will see the impossibility of explaining these mysteries, with all the light on such subjects that we have at present. There are various ways of disposing of such matters. Some people cut the Gordian knot, by declaring categorically that they believe nothing in them. Others admit that there do seem to be matters apparently supernatural, that can be explained in no other way. Others give their unqualified belief to the supernatural theory. We leave to the reader the free choice to adopt whichever method of disposing of the mysteries herein related as suits his own convictions. All that we claim is to have related things no more wonderful than many *believe* actually to have occurred. We are only acting as historian in the matter, recording the professed experience of others. That, of late years, such occurrences have been reported from various parts of the country, no one will deny. We have not assumed the task of demonstrating whether a portion, or all of these, are really supernatural, or a humbug, a delusion, a consummate legerdemain, or whether such as do not partake of these natures, may be explained on scientific grounds.

THE END.

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